





DAVID H. SHEPARD



37417 Niles Blvd  
Fremont, CA 94536



510-494-1411  
[www.nilesfilmmuseum.org](http://www.nilesfilmmuseum.org)

Scanned from the collections of  
Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum

Coordinated by the  
Media History Digital Library  
[www.mediahistoryproject.org](http://www.mediahistoryproject.org)

Funded by a donation from  
Jeff Joseph





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2012 with funding from  
Media History Digital Library

<http://archive.org/details/stardustinhollyw00gord>



FOG AND ARC LAMPS

From *The Docks of New York*  
Gouache by Jan Gordon

Fr

# STAR-DUST IN HOLLYWOOD

*By*  
JAN & CORA GORDON

*Illustrated by*  
THE AUTHORS



GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.  
LONDON                      BOMBAY                      SYDNEY

*First published September 1930*  
*by GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.*  
*39-41 Parker Street, Kingsway, London, W.C.*  
*Reprinted February 1931*

---

*Printed in Great Britain by The Riverside Press Limited*  
*Edinburgh*

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. LOS ANGELES—FROM AN EMPTY HOUSE	9
II. LOS ANGELES—FROM A BUNGALOW COURT	21
III. THE ABSORPTION OF 'TALK'	43
IV. LOS ANGELES—REAL ESTATE	54
V. HOLLYWOOD—FIRST DAYS ON THE MOVIE LOT	67
VI. HOLLYWOOD—THE DIRECTOR	101
VII. HOLLYWOOD—THE AUTHORS	117
VIII. LOS ANGELES-CUM-HOLLYWOOD	132
IX. HOLLYWOOD—THE STARS	146
X. HOLLYWOOD—THE ARTIST OF THE FILM	174
XI. HOLLYWOOD—ACTING ON THE FILM	197
XII. HOLLYWOOD—THE COMIC FILM	211
XIII. HOLLYWOOD—THE CAMERA-MAN	223
XIV. HOLLYWOOD—THE BAND OF HOPE	232
XV. LOS ANGELES—RELIGIONS	248
XVI. HOLLYWOOD—THE MADNESS OF MOVIE-TONE	268
XVII. THE MOVIE-TONE IN FRANCE	282



## ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
FOG AND ARC-LAMPS	<i>Frontispiece</i>
PICKLES OR SALVATION	26
THE MOVIE DOG STAR GOES HOME AFTER WORK	40
CAT AND BLACKBIRDS	42
THE HIDDEN TREASURE	44
THE SINGLE-HEADED CERBERUS	70
A HOLLYWOOD AUTHOR	72
INSIDE A 'STAGE'	74
LIGHTS AND CAMERAS	76
MEASURING OFF : REHEARSING THE FIGHT	78
THE MIDDLE-DISTANCE SHOT	84
BETTY'S FAKE EYELASHES	86
THE QUICK-LUNCH COUNTER	87
THE LASKY PARAMOUNT STEAMSHIP FROM THE STREET	92
THE DROWNED	100
BUTTON-BEARERS	102
THE LADY AND THE STAR	103
FROM NEW YORK TO HOLLYWOOD	109
CLYDE COOK	113
THE CUTTER	116
THE REAL FILM DICTATORS—SHERIFF, FLAPPER, AND PARSON	124
NIGHT IN CHINATOWN	128
ALMOST ANY SUBURB	134
NIGHT LOCATION ON MALIBU BEACH	136
A CALIFORNIAN HOLIDAY	145
MR MIX LECTURES	148
THE PASSING OF AGILITY	154
DOUG	160
BETTY COMPSON	163
PART OF THE CRUZES' CHRISTMAS CARD	164
CHARACTER	172
WOLHEIM	173

# *Star-dust in Hollywood*

	PAGE
ART AND NATURE	177
ORIGINAL ARTIST'S SKETCHES FOR SETS :	
(1) THE HOUSE OF THE CRIME	180
(2) THE PURSUIT	180
(3) THE PRISON OFFICE	182
(4) THE RECEPTION	182
SWITZERLAND IN HOLLYWOOD	185
STEAMER ON THE SEINE	192
MINIATURE UPPER STOREYS	194
THE WOULD-BE PUPIL	198
SPECIAL LANGUAGE	201
JIM CRUZE	204
THE WOMEN'S WARDROBE-ROOM	209
LAGOS SANDWICH-MEN	212
CHARLIE IN WEST AFRICA	213
COUNTING THE RHYTHM INTO IT	220
LUPINO LANE	222
DIGNITY AND IMPUDENCE	224
THE CAMERA	228
A JUICER	230
SHIFTING A THIRTY-SIX	231
WAITING FOR HER 'BREAK'	236
BOX LUNCHES FOR CAVALIERS	237
THE EX-DIRECTOR	241
MEXICAN EXTRA	244
HAWAIIAN SWIMMER	245
IF YOU HAVE TEARS . . .	247
SISTER AIMEE BAPTIZES BY HUNDREDS	259
THE IDEALISTS OF PERSHING PARK	266
A FURY OF BUILDING	275
EARLY TALKIES	280
MENJOU	284
THE SOUND STUDIO	286
ALEXANDRE'S NEW YEAR	290
JAN PLAYS BAILIFF	294
CAR AND CAMERA-BOX	295

# STAR-DUST IN HOLLYWOOD

## *Chapter I*

### LOS ANGELES—FROM AN EMPTY HOUSE

THE doctor took his stethoscope from my chest, shot the wrist-watch up his cuff, looked at me with a kindly but professionally soothing smile, and said :

“ I suppose you’ve had a pretty full life up to now? ”

I admitted the truth of his suggestion ; no doubt, an interesting life.

“ And you’ve got yourself well stocked up with experiences? ”

“ Nothing to complain of,” I answered, buttoning up my pyjama coat.

“ Well,” he said slowly, “ I’m afraid that for the rest of your life you will have to take things very easy. If I’d realized what your heart was like when you lifted that suitcase I’d have had a fit. You might have dropped dead on the stairs. Still, it may be a good thing in the end. Now you will have to keep quiet and suck the juice out of your experiences ; live on your honey like a bee, eh? ”

He gave me a reassuring pat, and, leading Jo from the room to the landing, he said to her :

“ And in addition to his heart he has a congestion in the lungs.”

But I, ignorant of his second complication, lay in that room flooded with the Californian sunlight and began to reflect on my future outlook. It is odd how easily, at such moments, a person is able to readjust himself to a complete right-about-face of circumstances ; of course, the physique

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

itself is at the moment tuned down to the change. I could philosophically look forward to a future mostly recumbent, scribbling away with a pad on my knees, driving out like an invalid in our old car with Jo at the wheel, and basking as an interesting relic under the vine pergola of some sunlit garden in the South of France. All of which proves that I was more ill than I imagined myself to be. The real shock came on to poor Jo, who, imagining that her husband was suffering from a rather severe attack of asthma, suddenly found that his life was in some danger. She was not at all in a placid condition that could cheerfully envisage the second half of a lifetime spent lying on the back.

The other person most troubled by my illness was perhaps the house-owner. We were there as willy-nilly lodgers in rather peculiar circumstances. The villa was in reality empty and set about with real estate signboards announcing "Attractive Mansion for Sale." Now and then, if Jo happened to be absent, parties of house-hunters would suddenly enter my room with a careless nonchalance, to find themselves confronted by a man in bed. Naturally, the idea that worried the house-owner must have been: "What kind of people are these camping out in my house, and how can I ever get rid of them in the end?"

"I should let *him* do the worrying if I were you," said his son-in-law, the doctor, after having ascertained that the congestion was making no headway. "I should let him do the worrying. My motto is: when you find a soft thing stick to it. After all, you are living here rent-free, and he can't very well turn you out until I tell him he can."

Which was the exact situation that the house-owner was afraid of. He saw us as eternal lodgers, Old Men of the Sea on that house's back. My unexpected presence in bed added no sales-value to that empty house; in fact, I prevented prospective purchasers from lounging at the bedroom window

## *Los Angeles—from an Empty House*

and contemplating the view of a never-ceasing procession of cars and trams along Vermont Avenue, two rows of huge, flamboyant hoardings, a half-building church in reinforced concrete, several twelve-storeyed blocks of service flats, and the normal undergrowth of low bungalow roofs stretching for miles to the dim contours of the Beverley Hills, on which were the palaces of the movie magnates.

Nobody would want to buy a house with a sick man planted in it; and although obviously I should have to leave on the signing of the purchase papers, I must nevertheless have acted almost like a spring frost on the tender buds of the acquisitive sense burgeoning in those 'viewers' souls.

I remember a Bab Ballad by Gilbert which concerned a man named Robinson who, if I remember rightly, had

. . . often eaten oysters,  
But had never had enough.

Up till this moment that had been my own position with regard to oranges. In my youth Christmas had meant primarily 'oranges.' We had toured Spain, but, alas, never in the orange season! For years my appetite had been whetted by the coloured advertisements in the *Saturday Evening Post* warning me that I was suffering from acidosis and that nothing would cure me but the plentiful juice of Sunkist oranges. Occasionally I plucked up courage to order 'orange juice' at some *café* or on the train, to be rewarded, at frightful expense, with a mealy fluid that looked like strained vegetable-marrow water and tasted as though an orange, having breathed upon the liquid, had passed on. Now I was flung into the position of shipwrecked Robinson on his oyster island. Not only was I given oranges *ad lib.*, I was refused all other kinds of sustenance. When Jo was not rushing off to the library to find more detective stories she was developing a marvellous wrist action with the orange-pulper. Thirty-

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

six oranges were my daily portion, supposed to substitute soups and *entrées*, roasts, veg., and cheese. I sipped my breakfasts, drank my lunches, gargled my suppers, and, if oranges really have the advertised alkaline reaction in the digestive tracts, I must have been alkaline all through, so that a piece of litmus-paper would have turned blue at the very thought of me. On the first day that I was allowed out of doors I felt that in the good American fashion I should have worn a large button with 'Sunkist' upon it in my coat-lapel.

The old house-owner had cause to worry. He had no measure by which to judge our probable actions, for the code of manners is still so uncoded that one has no measures by which to estimate action and reaction. All he knew was that we were so-called Bohemians, and in America so-called Bohemians are the highwaymen of society. In a land where impertinence is almost always successful the American Bohemian has pushed impertinence to limits unsuspected by any of Murger's heroes. We understand that, being in possession with his (rather startled) consent, and not paying any rent or receiving salary as caretakers, we might have been difficult to evict. Had we stood by the laws of our kind we could not only have stuck tight in the old man's house until the full force of the law had been brought to bear upon us, but also we might with luck have sold the place over his head and made off with the earnest-money. We have heard of even more nonchalant actions on the part of brother Bohemians. So no wonder the old man trembled.

We must confess to being Bohemians more in habits than in consciences, and, as soon as the doctor was sure that I would once more become a movable object, Jo set off with the doctor's wife in her car to hunt for suitable lodgings.

## *Los Angeles—from an Empty House*

I suppose we should explain the circumstances that had brought me to bed in an empty house in Los Angeles, Cal., U.S.A. Since the time when we had decently interred the remains of the Happy Hearse<sup>1</sup> in the car cemetery at Easyport we had been moving across the country, making our living and railway fares by casual lecturing. We had lodged for a month in a Swedish rooming-house in Chicago, but had seen no blink of hold-up men nor heard the sudden pistol chatter of street-duelling. We had, however, interviewed and sketched Mayor Thompson, the enemy of England, but had found no more than a dull, fat man with nectarine-coloured braces. We had sailed a part of the Mississippi in one of the last of the old stern-wheeled passenger-boats, had noted the devastations of the great floods, and had heard an old hobo on the levee at Greenfields declare :

“When the waters cleared away, I tell you, sir, the crawfish were that big and bold they’d stand right up in the gutters of this town and fight you back.”

We had spent much time in the night-courts of New Orleans, and had visited a strange, lost village of the Mississippi delta, inhabited by a Spanish colony, still speaking the Spanish of Don Quixote, muskrat hunters who had in recent years declared war against the United States and had won the only battle in the campaign. We had crossed the southern stretch of the continent in the “Sunset Limited,” accompanied by a mortician and embalmer who enlivened the route with memories of his customers and stories of his art. We had lectured in Los Angeles, had passed on to San Francisco, had bought an old air-cooled car there, and in it had returned to Los Angeles.

We had left New York in November; it was now March.

. . . . .  
<sup>1</sup> See *On Wandering Wheels* (John Lane).

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

The overseer of the firm that sold us the car in San Francisco had assured us : " She is all filled up : there's oil enough for a thousand miles in her." But either he lied or he had grossly misjudged her appetite for oil. For we had proceeded no more than a hundred and fifty miles on our route, when in the pitch dark of the night, miles apparently from anywhere, a grinding sound became audible from the engine, and our recent purchase came to an abrupt stop. I climbed out and lifted the hood, to find the cylinders glowing a gentle red, clearly not a healthy colour for motor-cylinders even in an air-cooled engine. Darkness and silence wrapped us round. So, leaving Jo with the car, I walked on, for the map showed a small village some distance ahead.

" It is strange," I thought, as I walked along, " how bad my asthma has become."

I had first been vividly conscious of a troublesome shortness of breath in Chicago during the blizzards. I had expected that with the passing of winter the trouble would diminish, but even the warm days of San Francisco spring failed to relieve me. Indeed, the more exercise that I took up and down the San Francisco hills the worse the trouble seemed to be. Now it was so distressing that I could walk forward only with a slow, plodding step, and I wondered, indeed, should the village prove very far, whether I could reach it. Luckily, after half a mile in the darkness, on turning a corner I found a camping-ground.

From that moment the road to Los Angeles was a series of accidents. We were delayed here, delayed there. Judging from the camp-grounds of the eastern States, we had expected to find in California a rough but almost hotel-like comfort, refreshment-stalls and cabins with good beds, mattresses, and blankets. The sanitary laws of California stepped in and almost killed me. We had to lie wrapless on the bare wire lattice of the springs, doing our best with newspaper. Three

## *Los Angeles—from an Empty House*

such nights we were delayed on the road instead of one, my asthma becoming such a nightly nuisance that I could sleep only propped up on a suit-case in lieu of a bolster. Yet an odd obstinacy prevented us from seeking more comfortable lodgings. We were due to dine and sleep in the palace of a millionairess at Santa Barbara, but could do no more than limp up to breakfast instead, leaving, to the ire of the dignified butler, our ten-year-old car, covered with three days' dust, before the noble front door. He would, I think, have sent us to the servants' entrance. At last, with a lecture recital to give on the same evening, we rolled into Los Angeles at four in the afternoon.

The only thing that had kept us going was soap. On the Cresta Pass, just before reaching San Louis Obispo, the car had stuck once more. This time it was not due to red-hot cylinders nor to fused piston rings. By the use of gravity I turned the car round, meaning to run down the hill to the nearest garage, when, lo, the engine started once more! I faced up hill again, the engine stalled; I turned down hill again, it started. Here was mystery, but we were able to climb the hill full speed backward. Clearly we could not back up every hill between San Louis Obispo and Los Angeles without causing undue excitement, so after a little detective work among the machinery I found a crack in the top of the vacuum tank. On steep hills the petrol was sucked up no longer. Soap, rather damp and squidgy soap, cured the trouble, though at intervals, as in the middle of Hollywood Boulevard, I had to leap out of the car, swing up the hood and repeat the poultice as before. Chewing-gum, well masticated, we found later was a much more permanent plug.

Lying advertisements lured us to the camp-ground in Los Angeles. However uncomfortable these wayside camp-grounds might be, we were promised a palatial one in Los Angeles, including bathrooms and cabins with kitchens. But

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

it was a deception. An immense sloping field was covered with shabby shacks like a Salvation Army encampment. There was no bedding, no glass or curtains to the windows. While Jo dashed off to find the bathroom I tried to get into my evening trousers, lying on the floor to avoid the stares of sinister-looking hobos who were camping outside, their shabby tents ranged under shelters of corrugated iron. The Californian camper seemed to be a much rougher type than his eastern *confrère*. We had expected the banquet, like all decent banquets, to be at about 7.30, and had allowed ourselves a good hour and a half in which to dress and find our way to the club. But a telephone message quickly undeceived us: the dinner was at 6.30, and we had only a wretched half-hour.

Jo's search for the bathroom was vain. We reached the club, at which we were to be the honoured guests, twenty minutes late, and not only unwashed, but visibly motor-soiled. Instead of accepting our formal introductions as nice celebrities should, we dashed straight to the club lavatories and washed. The doctor's wife, a friend from our earlier visit, had to scrub Jo's neck down to the dress limit—there was no time in which to clean merely invisible areas. We then could hold out our newly cleansed hands to the half-famished members. Before entering the supper-room I examined our instruments to see if any strings had broken, but to my dismay found that the plectrum of Jo's laud had somehow been jerked from the case and was lost. The shops by now were all shut, but luck discovered in the building a beauty parlour, and in the beauty parlour an eyebrow-brush, like a small tooth-brush. Our performance was saved.

Meanwhile Jo had her troubles. My breathing had become so difficult that I was forced to whisper as we went in to dinner: "I don't think I can possibly talk. You will have to give the lecture alone." And so, in the intervals between the courses, Jo, with an old lady on either side murmuring

## *Los Angeles—from an Empty House*

conventional platitudes into her ear, asking what she thought of Los Angeles and California, had to compose a new lecture to replace the one which we usually gave in alternate spasms.

The dismal feast, enlivened by nothing stronger than ginger ale, dragged out its length. Around us the members of the Women's Athletic Club valiantly tried to cut beefsteak with the backs of their forks, probably holding us to be uncouth vandals because we persisted in plying knife and fork with right and left. During Jo's lecture I struggled with the snapped-off handle of the eyebrow-brush. The beauty shop had further provided a corn-knife and a nail-file: with the former I whittled the handle, made of compressed milk, to a point; with the latter I rubbed it smooth, producing at last something, uncouth enough considered as a fine musical implement, yet one that would serve. After the talk we played Spanish peasant music on laud and guitar.

The members of the Women's Athletic Club rushed up to shake our hands while they were, so to speak, still hot from the music.

"Marvellous!" they cried to Jo. "How can you, so frail-looking a woman, go through such trials? But then, of course, you have your great husky husband behind you. How we would love to do as you do, but then we have never enough time or money."

When the rush had calmed the doctor drew Jo aside and murmured in her ear:

"I don't like the look of your husband at all. He's too grey."

"Nor do I," said Jo, "and he was so breathless this evening that he couldn't speak."

"Whatever made you go to that camping-ground?" said the doctor.

"We didn't know of any other place," replied Jo, "and the advertisements told such splendid lies about it."

"Look here," said the doctor's wife, "the children are

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

away to-night, so we have a room free. Go back to that camp-ground, pack up, and come over to us for the night. To-morrow you can make other arrangements."

As we came out of the club the rain was falling steeply. However, these good Samaritans drove us back to the camp and waited while we repacked the car and while I put another dose of soap into the crack. Then they guided us through the night, a mere six miles or so to their house in one of the more quiet, palm-lined avenues among the number three thousands east.

On the day following the children came back and we had to turn out, but the doctor, suspecting that I was not fit to be moved far, transferred me next door to his father-in-law's house, in which, by luck, a large bed had been left.

In this way I came to be lying in an empty house overlooking from a slight slope the crude but sunlit newness of Los Angeles.

. . . . .

We could not bring ourselves to treat the good doctor's father-in-law, whom we did not know, with such easy nonchalance as our Samaritan the doctor suggested. When I was fit to move with due precautions Mrs Beechman, the doctor's wife, conducted Jo on a hunt for a suitable lodging.

I could not have picked a better spot in which to fall ill. The spring climate seemed perfect; the pale blue, almost cloudless, skies succeeded one another day after day infallibly; there was little difficulty in finding suitable lodgings which were quite cheap. Los Angeles was still recuperating from the aftermath of a land boom. Speculation had been so wild, such a tremendous rush of speculators, tourists, and new inhabitants had been expected, that the town was much overbuilt, and a thousand lodgings of all sorts stood invitingly empty. We could have lived in tall buildings with elevators,

## *Los Angeles—from an Empty House*

in low buildings with stairs, or in bungalows grouped in sets of a dozen at a time; we could have sheltered behind walls of steel and brick, of honest clap-boarding, or of chicken wire, tarred paper, and plaster; we could have picked our style as freely as our material. Within the four hundred square miles of city area, "the biggest city in the world," architects had apparently gone crazy trying to create some new note amid a widespread monotony. Jo, of course, did not have to search all of the four hundred square miles for a lodging. Within a mile of my bed, on the fringes of Hollywood, the nobler houses of the moderately rich dwindled suddenly into the modest dwellings of what we may call the great bungalow plain, which embraces perhaps some two hundred or more miles of the city's inflated area. On this edge of the great bungalow plain Jo and Mrs Beechman easily found what they were looking for. Most of the bungalows in this district had succumbed to a style vaguely called Mexican, built of rough-cast, ochred plaster smeared on tarred paper with a chicken-wire foundation, a type of construction which, considering the unaggressive quality of the climate, would shelter one from the weather, but which was not intended to stand severe treatment—a hard-pitched cricket-ball would have dented most of the walls like a spoon on egg-shell. The courts were arranged as a three-sided oblong. At the bottom was usually a single bungalow, so that the side dwellings stared into one another's windows across a central footpath in a manner disconcertingly intimate to our European susceptibilities. The windows were, however, romantically small, assisting the illusion of Mexicanism, and although this did perhaps increase the sense of privacy by making them difficult to look out of, it also darkened the interiors in a most dismal fashion. These bungalow courts were too cramped to offer any opportunity of sitting outside in the air, and one might almost come to the opinion that the

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

everyday inhabitants of California showed an appreciation of the much-advertised climate by using it as little as possible.

However, at last, in Blank Avenue, Jo and the doctor's wife discovered a court that showed some pretence to spaciousness. It was built of wood coloured in a tiger-like combination of black and vivid orange. A nice space of lawn separated the rows of bungalows one from the other, and in the centre of the lawn was an ornamented bird basin, although since it was usually dry the birds had little benefit. Cypressess stood at the corners of the lawn, aloes or yuccas along the centre line, and two enormous banana-trees made one feel that the tigers had outgrown the jungle. In a quaint old book on hawking the author warns the hawk-owner against allowing his hawk to lay an egg, an accident which comes of "too much daintyness and lustful pryde," and which may cause the bird's death. One of the banana-trees celebrated our arrival with a similar accident which had a like fatal result. It thrust up a tall spike of unremarkable bloom, very popular with the bees; the spike changed slowly into a cluster of hard green bananas which drooped more and more weightily from the bouquet of broad, flat leaves. But though the Californian sun could thus excite the "lustful pryde" of the banana-tree it was powerless to bring the crop to ripeness. After this effort the tree withered, and had to be cut off, leaving our tigerish dwellings sadly lop-sided in jungly atmosphere.

But our friend the doctor suddenly decided to doctor no longer, and to become instead the promoter of a Swedish ice-box company. He passed me on to the best heart specialist of Los Angeles, a Jewish humorist and humanist, who, with the broad liberality of a Lessing's Nathan, visited me thrice a week and refused all fee other than a modest sketch.

## Chapter II

### LOS ANGELES—FROM A BUNGALOW COURT

FOR £10 a month we were in some luxury. The front room of our new bungalow was wide, acting as drawing-room on one side of the entrance door, as dining-room on the other. In the middle of the drawing-room wall a wide door of glass hung with lace curtains looked as though it led to yet more palatial quarters, but disclosed a shallow recess in which was a double-bedded mattress standing on its head, one of those collapsible bedsteads so valuable in the comic films, the springs of which go wrong at the wrong moment and snap up the unlucky sleeper as though it was the lower jaw of Jonah's whale itself. To the right of these fictitious doors a smaller door led to an authentic bedroom, with an orthodox bed, on which I lay for another month, taking in such haphazard impressions of the city as came within my limited range. From the dining portion of our front room the door led into a true American movie kitchen, with ice-box, air-cooler, collapsible ironing-board, automatic water-heater, gas oven, and folding tables. Between the kitchen and my bedroom was the space that threatens to become as sacred in any American house as was the chapel in a Gothic *château*, the bathroom.

London lodgings can be dreary to an indescribable degree, but they have a character which often makes us like to imagine that they have been furnished by an industrious though tasteless jackdaw. But the American rooming-house seems as if it had been handed over, lock, stock, and barrel, to the merchant in second-hand suites. We are often tempted

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

in England to demand whence came or whither go these 'suites' displayed along Tottenham Court Road or other haunts of the furniture-dealer; in what houses hang these gilt-framed, warranted hand-painted oil-pictures? In America their destination is no mystery. The rooming-house engulfs them. A half of the newly-weds and all of the great tribe of the peripatetic must be content with the stamped plush of their rather uninspiring luxury.

Our bungalow-court lodging was perhaps a little symbolic: flamboyant and vivid without, standardized with a kind of crisp, new dinginess within; outside cheerful in the very fervour of its raw, half-exotic bad taste, inside aloof and unapproachable, seeming to hold one off, with an almost sullen determination to resist any of Jo's approaches toward intimacy or her efforts to make it seem cosy and homelike. All the eight months of our sentence at Los Angeles we felt like intruders in our own house. Amid that aloof dinginess the splendid bathroom glowed white and lovely like a vision of the Virgin in a miracle play, and, lest we should be accused of a light blasphemy in the metaphor, we must insist that the American cult of the bathroom has much of the religious, and that few of the younger generation whom we have met if forced to choose between cleanliness and godliness would hesitate long over the choice.

With the kindly help of May Beechman, who had appointed herself as a rather worried but very affectionate godmother, we settled ourselves in our new house. Only one cloud dimmed the immediate future. On our previous visit to Los Angeles, when we had lectured to the Friday Morning Club, and the Book and Play Club, we had been the object of invitations from a large number of almost overwhelmingly enthusiastic people who, on one introduction, had at once constituted themselves our intimate friends. We had then explained our immediate departure for San Francisco. They

## *Los Angeles—from a Bungalow Court*

had pressed their addresses and telephone numbers on us, and had extracted from us solemn promises that we would spread the news as soon as we came back, and would renew the whirlwind intimacy so abruptly severed. The thought of these eager would-be friends now hung over us rather as a threat than as a blessing. Not to inform them of our return would be the direst of discourtesies, and yet I was not fit enough for Jo to accept any outside hospitality. At last she wrote round, telling of my condition and suggesting that we might always be found in at tea-time. Then we sat back and prepared to resist the shock of an expression of sympathy as enthusiastic as the invitations. We need not have worried about the matter. To all of Jo's letters only two answers were received. Those who were eager to get the latest travelling notorieties as party exhibits to their house looked with very different eyes on a sick Englishman and his wife harbouring in one of the millions of lower middle-class dwellings lost in the immensities of the great bungalow plain. Though we had feared a too enthusiastic acceptance the apparently concerted nature of this rejection, coming on the top of so much uninvited insistence, had a cold-blooded quality that gave us a shock. We had descended among the bungalow dwellers, a decided loss of caste, although in Chicago, where we had taken a room in a cheap Swedish boarding-house, we had experienced the most warm-hearted hospitality; in New Orleans the welcome had apparently been given to our personalities, and in San Francisco the easy good nature that delighted us had, we are sure, no reference to our lodgings. But in this Southern California, concentrated on health and wealth, the fact of illness carried a chilling suggestion of failure. There is a story of a millionaire who, having listened for a while to an old schoolfellow's tale of ill luck, presses the bell. "John," he says to the footman, "show this gentleman out. He is breaking my heart."

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

One should face the inevitable. In a land of optimism you cannot associate with people who break your heart; in a land where all social positions are fluid one must be prepared to reject those who fall behind in the money race, and to accept rejection philosophically from those who leave us behind. In a land where conversation is almost wholly limited to business, psycho-analysis, birth-control, and bootleg the only easy basis of association is that of equal incomes and parallel interests; therefore a certain cold-bloodedness in acquaintanceship must be cultivated almost in self-defence. The English-speaking Union, which wrote asking us to give the society a free lecture, on receiving the reply that I was seriously ill, could not be bothered to send back even conventional regrets.

. . . . .

To me, lying there bedridden for a month and subsequently in the garden in a deck-chair, chasing the shadow round the foot of a cypress-tree, the life of Los Angeles came gradually and in a peculiar way. My bedroom window, with the happy impertinence of American gregariousness, stared straight into the front windows of the landlord's own bungalow ten feet away; only my blinds interposed a thin copper-wire mist between us. When the occasional winds were direct enough to pierce the mist they brought with them a peculiar aroma from the other dwelling—a mixture of face creams, scent, house soap, and furniture polish. For it seemed to us that our handsome landlady's life was spent in the pursuit of cleanliness. She had a fierce and scolding pernicketyness that had worn out the patience of every char within hiring range. She thus had reduced herself to the position of family drudge. First she had to clean her house, then she had to clean her house from herself, and then, with face creams and vanishing creams and home massage, manicure, and chiropody,

## *Los Angeles—from a Bungalow Court*

she had to repair in her person the ravages due to the evil and anxiety of housework. By the time that was over she had to go to bed, to begin again on the following morning. Every day the vacuum-cleaner chanted its matutinal dirge, and even her husband looked as though he had been vacuum-cleaned with the rest and finished with the polishing cloth.

Yet you must not think of her as a slatternly drudge or a conventional landlady, for she would have been, to English eyes, a wealthy woman. Her husband was the best clarinet and saxophone player on the Californian coast, one of those lucky beings who exhale music as naturally as a bird sings; who never was forced to practise scales for his fingers' celerity. Chief musician in an important movie orchestra he earned his three thousand pounds a year with little effort. In addition to this the court, with its aggregate of fourteen dwellings, represented little less than a thousand pounds a year in rentals, and they had built a second in the neighbourhood. They also owned plots of land in all parts of the city, so that, apart from purely speculative investments, their income could easily amount to five thousand pounds a year or more.

Our visitors, apart from the two or three Los Angelesians who showed a friendly faithfulness in spite of the disgrace of my collapse, were almost all commercial. Immediately the report spread that new lodgers had moved into Bungalow No. 6, 2000 Blank Avenue, the travelling salesmen crowded to our doors. Jo, with eager delight, saw our cupboards slowly fill with free samples of all kinds. They seemed determined that we should be clean at any cost, for soap was thrust upon us in such quantities that we bought none during the greater part of our stay; clearly America, clamouring for bigger and better cleanliness, had miscalculated either the length of our visit or our capacities for washing. Strange breakfast foods, in brightly coloured cardboard boxes full of stuff like toasted sawdust, but guaranteed to contain all the

## Star-dust in Hollywood

proteids, carbohydrates, and vitamins necessary to the man who eats more with his intellect than with his palate, came second on the free list. Quack doctors, hearing that I was an invalid, would have forced their way in to cure me on the spot ; tailors would have dragged me from bed and measured



PICKLES OR SALVATION

me for real American suits on the gradual-payment system ; wireless salesmen would have thrust four-valve sets into our house apparently quite careless of whether we could pay ; sweet manufacturers almost took us by the gullets to thrust their 'goodies' between our teeth. Jo had to repulse crystal-gazers, dry cleaners, face *masseurs*, fat-reducers, a miniature - painter, a bone-setter, three photographers, face mud, cleaning jelly, electric irons, silk stockings, knitted butterflies, motor mascots, dried prunes,

pressed figs, corset belts, gramophone discs, household gadgets, breath disinfectants, and body-odour eliminators. A woman peddling sweet pickles caught Jo at the back door and, as we already had pickles, tried to convert her. But, learning that I was convalescent, she hurried to the front, where, finding me stretched out on my long chair under the cypress-tree, she preached an energetic sermon over me, begging me to join her in thanking the Lord for my narrow escape and pointing out with the pickle-bottle the road to salvation. Her eloquence seemed inexhaustible,

## *Los Angeles—from a Bungalow Court*

and at last I rose, crept carefully to the house, and locked myself into the bathroom.

She left behind in my seat a slip of paper on which the following was printed :

HOW TO BECOME A PREACHER

HOW TO DELIVER A MESSAGE

HOW TO GET AN AUDIENCE

If you wish to become an effective Preacher get a supply of our "Special Feature" Gospels of John and carry at least one or more copies with you.

The Blessing of your own soul will repay you many fold for the time and money spent.

It will be surprising to find how the Holy Spirit will guide you as to whom to speak to—possibly your seat-mate, your companion on a trip, the person by your side on the crowded car, ferry, street, bargain-counter, or possibly a lone person on the highway.

These gospels are especially adapted to Christian Workers, and we feel there is nothing like them in print.

A fine thing for our soldiers, sailors, nothing like it in print for the price; paper covers  $2\frac{1}{2}$  cts each; by mail  $\frac{3}{4}$  ct extra. Phone, call, or write.

Evidently she had been 'trying it on the dog.'

In addition to these were the local touts, seven laundry-men, five grocers' boys, the ice-man, the egg pedlar, an old cowboy converted to Holy Rolling, the bottled-water man, who installed a complicated apparatus in our kitchen which ensured that we should use no other water, and a lean-faced Greek who sold fruit and greens in a tremendous voice and illicit wine in a whisper. Newspaper boys were peculiarly persistent (starting their roads to fortune in the traditional American way). These adolescent youths stood on the doorstep and stated plaintively that they would not be able to finish their college course unless we handed them a year's subscription to the *Los Angeles Times* or the *Examiner*. But,

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

as we had read recently that too many American boys were passing through college for the amount of work open to university graduates, we hardened our hearts.

"Wadje mean," exclaimed one incredulously, "don't read the newspapers?"

"Why should we?"

"Well, how d'yer know what's going on?"

"What difference does it make to me what is going on?" I protested.

"Well, all I can say is, you'd better go on dig yourself out a cave and bury yourself in it," he retorted.

And as he left the court he loudly informed the lodgers in the farthest bungalow:

"D'jou believe it? There's a guy in that bungalow up there that don't want to know nothing at all."

In the end house of the court a special room had been constructed as wastepaper-basket for the enormous masses of newspaper consumed by the other lodgers. About thirty pounds' weight of Sunday newspapers alone were cast in every Monday morning, and once a week the paper-refuse cart passed and collected the discarded piles of raw reading matter in which Los Angeles delighted.

And yet in the end we succumbed to the frightful fascination of the American newspaper. We did not think then of collecting headlines, but an American humorous paper, the *Boulevardier*, published in Paris, has taken a sample which we may offer. The following are headlines from a single issue of a New York morning paper:

LOVE-MAD MODEL HELD IN ARTIST'S KILLING

DRY RAIDERS ROUT DEBS ON PARK AVENUE

BEER KING MACHINE-GUNNED

FRANKIE DUNN SLAIN: KILLER SUICIDE

"COMA" DEATH STARTS PROBE

## *Los Angeles—from a Bungalow Court*

RUM BUYING LAWFUL U.S. COURT DECIDES  
KILLER ENDS OWN LIFE  
BEATEN, TIED, ROBBED  
ARTIST'S WIFE KILLED BY SQUAW, TOOL OF  
LOVE-MAD INDIAN MAID  
BEATEN BY WIFE, "OTHER WOMAN" SEEKS \$25,000  
WOMAN'S SNATCH AT CANDY BARES DEAD  
BABY MYSTERY  
RACKET CASE GOES TO JURORS TO-DAY  
LEFT BOUND, GAGGED 21 HOURS IN HOLD-UP  
DOG AND SERVANTS SHARE IN ACTRESS' \$150,000 WILL  
BUSINESS MAIDEN REFUTES STATEMENT OF  
ALTAR-SHY MAN  
IF CHILD SUCKS THUMB, THERE'S A CURE;  
IF DONE BEFORE MIRROR DAILY, HE WILL QUIT  
SARDINES BATTLE TO ESCAPE SMOKE

And the following is compiled from the evening issues of  
the same day:

OUIJA BOARD MURDER LAID TO JEALOUSY  
MYSTERY MALADY GRIPS HUNDREDS WHO  
DRANK "JAKE"  
FINDING BABY'S BODY IN STREET LEADS TO  
DISCOVERY OF STARVING KIN  
HOOVER OPTIMISM AIDS TRADE  
FEUD FEARED AFTER KILLING IN HOBOKEN  
8 "WIVES" VISIT MAN AND SON IN CELLS  
AS POLYGAMISTS  
WOMAN MEETS DEATH BY FALL INTO BATH-TUB  
SUICIDE ACTRESS' MOTHER, CUT OFF IN WILL,  
MAY FIGHT  
BANDITS SHOOT PAIR AND FLEE WITH \$6500  
MODERN WOMEN WANT OWN CAR FOR FAMILY USE  
SADIST TAIN'T LED POISONER TO KILL ELEVEN AND  
BRAG OF IT, SAYS SCIENCE  
BETRAYED HERMIT'S ENDURING LOVE BARED BY  
SHRINE TO FAITHLESS WIFE  
WOMAN SOUGHT BY COPS IN YOUNG WIFE'S MURDER

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

VICTIM SHOT IN HALL DIES IN MATE'S ARMS  
MYSTERY CLOAKS WOMAN'S DEATH LEAP  
FROM FERRY  
GIRL TRIED AS BANDIT-MURDERER  
BOY, 15, HELD SLAYER, MAY ESCAPE TRIAL  
GIRL KILLED IN AUTO DRIVE  
PARENTS SEIZED AS RUM-RUNNERS  
CAN A HOMELY GIRL WIN?

Los Angeles papers were not a whit behind their New York competitors, yet with certain additional peculiarities, such as the scandalous doings of Aimee McPherson, the hot-gospeller, or her mother, "Ma Kennedy," and the vagaries of Hollywood. Here are the headlines from a single page of the *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, which was not selected, but happens to be among our records for a different reason :

150 POISONED IN MYSTERY  
TOT INJURED BY FALLING BOTTLE  
LOW CARD IN "HERALD" GOLF  
MOTHER'S FULL STORY OF BREAK WITH AIMEE BARED  
LOS ANGELES MAN SLAIN ON DAY OF WEDDING,  
HUNT THREE MEN  
MERCURY GOES TO 80  
MRS KENNEDY TELLS DIVORCE THREATS OF  
MRS ORNISTON, AIMEE SUFFERS IN SILENCE, SHE SAYS  
WIFE SUES WILLIAM FARNUM, NAMING  
OTHER WOMAN  
TRAGEDY BRIDE  
THIRTY SOUTH CALIFORNIA FOREST FIRES REPORTED  
UNDER CONTROL  
HOOVER TO STOP HERE ON TOUR OF U.S.  
"PETTING" TOPIC IN A LOS ANGELES SUNDAY  
SCHOOL MEET  
LONDON NOBLEMAN NAMED AS WORLD SUNDAY  
SCHOOL HEAD  
NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH? WOMAN AUTHOR  
TRIES IT. FINDS "WHITE FIBS" EASIER

## *Los Angeles—from a Bungalow Court*

The text under these headlines often has a peculiar flavour, sometimes reminiscent of the *Ruthless Rhymes*. Under "Tragedy Bride" was the following :

This picture is believed by the police to be that of the girl who was to have married the victim to-day when a gangland bullet snuffed out his life and left her waiting at the altar.

In another place :

'Petting,' as a testing of the love responses and a necessary preliminary to marriage, was vested with legitimacy to-day in concluding seminar sessions of the World Sunday School Convention.

Elsewhere :

His skull fractured and his head severely lacerated from the effects of having a five-gallon water-bottle fall on his head as he attempted to climb up the water-cooler at his home, Richard O'Brien, four years old, was to-day near death at the San Pedro General Hospital.

As a writer in *Blackwood* has pointed out . . . if one crosses the street at some unmarked spot and is run down by a car the newspapers' comment will probably be :

"Another pop-eyed jay walker hits death."

Seen through the eyes of the newspapers, Los Angeles was a curious phenomenon. A grim battle in the streets between bootleggers, during which over a hundred shots were fired, was honoured by an inch and a half, but a tragic and drunken love-affair between a butcher's boy and a wealthy man's wife occupied the front pages for weeks. Aimee McPherson, the hot-gospeller, was always appearing in the headlines, accused of participating in a land swindle : accused by her mother of perjury to the police : accused of bribing justice : reunited to her mother, who was accused in turn of what is called 'heart balm,' otherwise breach of promise to marry : touring in Europe to convert London and to investigate the "vice-haunts of Paris," with a Bible in her hands. There

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

were investigations of a farm at which boys were systematically kidnapped and murdered. In the case of Mrs Collins her son had disappeared. After five months the police reported him found, and returned an impostor to the poor woman. She denied his identity, so the police thrust her into the asylum, saying she was 'a nut.' Discharged by the doctors as perfectly sane, she tried to resume her work in the telephone service, but was dismissed on the grounds that she had been in an asylum. The boy was proved to be an impostor, but the police refused to censure the officer in charge of the case. Marco, the king of the underworld and chief gangster for a bank that was financing the principal bootleggers, shot two strangers in a cabaret. He was condemned first to six months' imprisonment for bootlegging, then for two years for the shooting. "Till the elections are over," a cynical Los Angelesian assured me. "Then he will appeal and come out again. They can't condemn him. He's got too much graft."

Every single issue of a Los Angeles paper rivalled in horrors, in weird murders, divorces, tragedies, lunacies, the best efforts of the most lurid London Sunday paper gleaning England for a week.

. . . . .

Although, luckily, our landlord desisted from home practice we were not deprived of music. In former days these bungalows had let for as much as £16 a month, but, owing to the tremendous land slump and the heavy overbuilding of similar places, the rents had been reduced to £10. In comparison with rival bungalow courts they gave more accommodation for equal rents and had a larger garden. So the bungalows in our group were seldom empty, although our landlady had the habit of bewailing the hard times and their own serious losses. Out of the fourteen bungalows at least nine were in continual use, and of the nine at least

## *Los Angeles—from a Bungalow Court*

six had wireless sets with loud speakers bought on the instalment system. In addition to these the bungalow court immediately behind us was equally well supplied with its quota of radio apparatus or gramophones. On the most favourable occasions we might have to submit to the blarings of some twelve simultaneous trumpets torturing the long-suffering sound-waves. In American parlance we suffered from 'an earful.' Front or back the coarse-voiced cacophony persisted, starting at 7.30 in the morning, when the housewives underwent their thinning exercises and physical jerks to commands from headquarters, continuing all through the morning with musical programmes or cooking recipes carefully followed, so that perhaps twenty thousand of the Los Angeles husbands fed, so to speak, on the air. There was no escape; if one housewife left home another came in. They seemed to have a horror of silence, the terror of an emptiness within their own skulls. The American wireless has been dominated by publicity. These varied programmes, or most of them, were provided by generous but clamorous commercial firms, so that before and after each selection the introducer would bellow (and the coarser-grained of the American voices do not come sweetly from the trumpet):

"Now, folks, you're going to hear the *Prelude*, by Rachmaninoff, played by the world-famous pianist Zubisky. Now, folks, this piece is presented by the Near East Carpet Company of Summer and Fifth Streets; so, folks, while you're listening to their treat don't forget that it's due to the Near East Carpet Company."

And when the piece was over:

"Hello, folks, that's Rachmaninoff's *Prelude*, given by the Near East Carpet Company. The next piece on our programme to-night will be . . ."

If there had been but one transmitting-station the noise might have been bearable, but a couple of dozen or more

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

must have been within range of the listeners-in. Amateur establishments also thrust themselves on the air: the Hollywood Breakfast Club broadcasts its orgies of ham and eggs; Aimee McPherson's temple was so powerful that it had to be reduced legally, for she was continually breaking into serious concerts with devastating interruptions of "Praise the Lord," or "Now I want you all to listen to the Glory Station of Radioland." The cinemas broadcast their first nights. Dinner speeches, political speeches, lectures, book talks saving the listeners from reading the literature reviewed, revival meetings, football and boxing matches . . . the air received them impartially and poured them out from competitive trumpets. The time of the Presidential elections was now drawing near, and for hours dreary voices drawled, fog-horned, or bellowed on, interrupted by tumultuous shouts, catcalls, squeakers, explosions, and other engines of American political enthusiasm. Set poor Robinson Crusoe down on Blank Avenue and he might well have exclaimed: "Oh, solitude, where is thy spell?" The mind was staggered to remember that there were four hundred square miles thus continuing all the while in this piece of reclaimed desert near the Pacific shore, this town that local boosters claimed to be a combination of the delights of paradise, heaven, Eden, and the Riviera.

. . . . .

Of the people who provided us with this continual cacophony we saw little. They kept so close that we were almost reduced to inferring their presence by the dissonances and overtones with which they troubled the Californian atmosphere, by the dollops of newspapers or *Saturday Evening Posts* that the successful pedlars flung at their front doors as they hastily bicycled round the court, by their lit windows at night, and by the daily pilgrimages of dust-bins from

## *Los Angeles—from a Bungalow Court*

the back door to the road and *vice versa*. For hours I sat stretched on the lawn, reading or making notes for *On Wandering Wheels*, but even from this point of vantage I could not come to know our neighbours by sight. Opposite was a young girl student of the California University; she passed to and fro from lessons bearing books; with her we exchanged smiles and an occasional word, but for the rest the court might have been almost deserted. Nobody ever tried to take advantage of the green grass or the warm air; few visitors ever passed under the black-and-orange archway of the entrance, but if ever they did the whole court was aware of their arrival, for the shrieks and cries of enthusiastic welcome were enough to have sufficed for the reappearance of a long-lost Uncle Jim from Australia. One man did call at intervals upon our hostess and was welcomed with a strident shriek of "Come right in!" Indeed, we were almost on the edge of suspecting the near presence of an illicit romance. This was dashed on learning that he was only the real estate broker engaged in augmenting their already not inconsiderable fortune. The truth is the people seemed to venture rarely into the open air. If they wished to go out they slipped from the back door to the garage, shut themselves primly into a closed car, and drove away. If they wished to do the family shopping they drove into large open-air grocery shops, specially arranged so that they could select their provisions without getting out of the car. If they wished for distraction they drove to the sea or up into the hills and stared at the view through the wind-shield. They seemed to be almost as destitute of permanent friends as they were of personal furniture; the wireless, the car, the daily newspaper, or the *Saturday Evening Post*, work, cooking, and 'studying how to stay thin' seemed to fill their lives to the full. There was no reason to believe that our bungalow court differed much from the thousands of bungalow courts,

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

private dwellings, or apartment houses spread far and wide over the great bungalow plain and springing up like a parti-coloured rash over all the hills within a radius of twelve or fifteen miles from the city hall.

My range of vision was naturally limited, tied as I was to my small meanderings round the cypress-tree. But as my health began to be re-established Jo enlarged her limits of movement whenever somebody would take her out in a car. The large rectangular monotony of the town, combined with her innate lack of directional sense, gave Jo almost a horror of venturing on foot in the streets. There was, indeed, small pleasure in such exercise. At a pedestrian pace the eye could feast only on endless repetitions of low houses, green lawns cut with pavements and set with fern palms, long lines of hoardings plastered with huge and garish posters, crude, square open shops made from raw brick, garages and gasoline-stations, and numberless street-crossings which one was not allowed to pass over unless the signal lights permitted.

Her excursions afoot were dictated by sheer necessity to the public library or to the grocery, all the other necessities came to our door. The milkman was our alarum clock; the cheery ice-man in his blue-and-white-striped overall, who put his daily ration unasked into the ice-box, and the Greek with vegetables were daily callers; the water-man, the egg-man, and the olive-pedlar measured our appetites and spaced their visits to suit. Sometimes gluts of perishable fruit occurred, and the town would be filled with motor-car pedlars selling quantities of bananas for a shilling, peaches or apples by the bucketful for a few pence.

In spite of a long residence in America, the Greek was still European. With him we felt none of that curious invisible barrier that separates the New World from the Old. Undoubtedly the man cheated us, but we felt easier with him

## *Los Angeles—from a Bungalow Court*

despite all his cheating, because of the understandable humanity of his intercourse. Though we came from one end of Europe and he from the other, we understood one another instinctively. Sympathy ran straight between us. Rough and uncultured though he might be, modest bootlegger, petty cheat, sometimes fobbing us off slyly with damaged goods in a way that an American might have disdained to do, he was still European. There were no barriers between us. Indeed, this easiness of intercourse with the Greek brought home to us, for the first time, the actual existence of this inter-continental barrier. Kipling cried :

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.

But to our minds the separation should be perhaps :

Europe, Asia, Africa, America, never these four shall meet.

There might be less friction between us could we but realize that we understand Americans almost as little as they understand us, and that, in spite of the fact that they dress like us and speak like us, they are in reality profoundly sundered from us both in habit and angle of vision. This barrier must probably become wider with the limitations of immigration.

This continental difference was further emphasized by our charman, an odd, derelict Englishman. Hopeless failure though he was in a land of so much opportunity, he seemed to have no vices which would account for his poverty.

He lived in some wretched shack at a pound a month, and eked out a menial existence by cleaning at a dollar an hour. Still he had retained all his insular arrogance. He talked rarely ; the history of his life remained a mystery, except for some vague allusions to "the time when I was a hengineer." He expressed himself in an odd, stilted English firmly on two occasions. Once he said :

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

"You'll hexcuse me, sir and madam, but what I says about these people is they hare barbarians. They 'ave no culture."

On the second occasion our rich landlady offered him work, which he unhesitatingly refused.

"If you'll hexcuse me, madam," he said to Jo, "Hi've seen that sort before. They do not know 'ow to be'ave to a hemployee."

Like most Englishmen, however, he had his hobby and was a passionate amateur painter. In his shack, which he called "the Studio," he copied postcards in oil-paint during his leisure. Once he had sold a sketch for a pound.

The Greek confessed himself unhappy in this land of sunshine and high wages.

"Ya eats well, an' ya earns good money," he said, "but what's da use'a dat? I tell ya, dey ain't no fun here. Ya gets tired of going to da movie, or gettin' drunk, or playin' de card. Dat ain't no fun. Back in my country I 'member we uset'a dance in de street, an' we sing, an' we make'a fun wit' de girl. . . . Ya don' get much to eat dere, but life's easy. Here ya gets plenty ta eat, but life's hard."

Nevertheless we had met his kind all up and down the Balkans. Would he have been content in Greece? We doubt it. He was not an American yet. Europe clung still closely about his soul, but he was a Greek spoiled. Absence may make the heart grow fonder, but return does not always make that affection permanent, for absence has eliminated the memories of a thousand minor irritations and inconveniences.

Undoubtedly the American-European barrier is a smaller one than that which separates us from Asia and Africa. And yet the combination of Africa and America may make something that often seemed to us strangely akin to the European. For with the really cultivated 'coloured person' (or what is called 'coloured' in America) we found an ease of

## *Los Angeles—from a Bungalow Court*

communicated sympathy that proved the barriers to be low indeed. Naturally, in numbers of individual cases with white Americans, this barrier is small also, yet try as much as we would to dismiss it from the intercourse of those we were most friendly with, something was sure to happen, sooner or later, that proved its persistence.

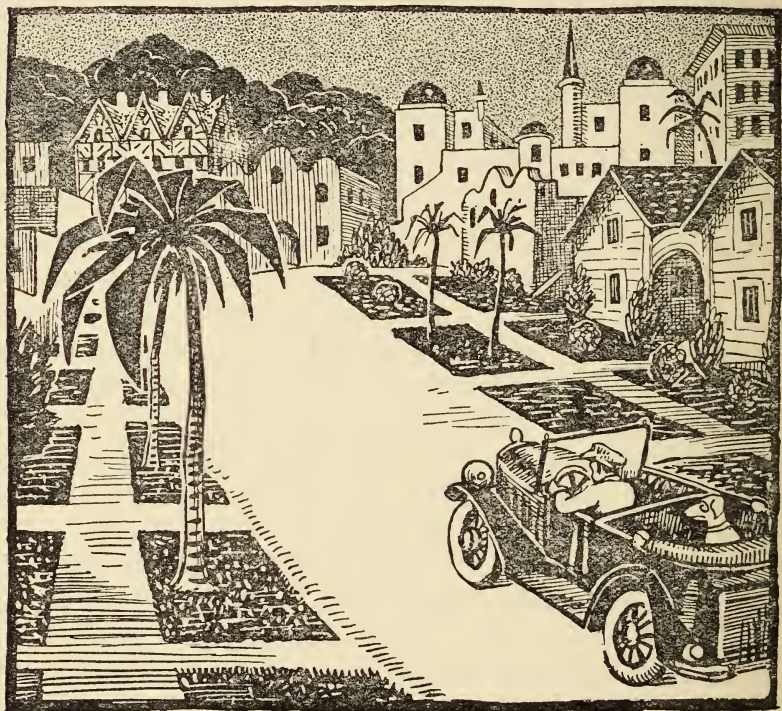
. . . . .

A peculiarity of our court was its dog, the cat, and the blackbirds. The dog was not kept primarily as a pet, for we never saw a town with fewer pet animals. Not a house that we visited had a pet in it except that of Alice Beechman, whose children had a goat. During an eight-months stay, including many rambles within that four-hundred-square-mile limit of the town, I don't think we saw ten dogs. In fact, we can now recall only the dog that lived opposite us and its famous rival, the movie star dog of "Our Gang," whom we might occasionally meet riding home from work in its car with its master (or should we not rather say parasite) as chauffeur. The dog in our court was a movie star also, a minor star, it is true, and at the moment convalescent after a car accident. It had a high reputation as the dog that could walk most easily—that is, without slipping or jerking—upon its hind legs, and as such had earned a salary probably higher than anything that the present authors have ever gained by the practice of literature. However, it was more condescending than most of the other stars, and even used to beg us for a drink of water on the hot afternoons. For some time this daily request, quite plainly indicated, puzzled us. But at last its mistress opined that the sun on their kitchen in the afternoon heated the water in the pipes. Our water was cooler, and the dog star evidently something of an epicure in drinks. His master was a carpenter at a 'quickie' company. He was one of those who built moated

## Star-dust in Hollywood

granges, Hungarian *châteaux*, streets of Paris, Berlin, London, New York and so on at a moment's notice, flinging lath and plaster aloft into the skies for a ten-days illusion of reality.

The cat was a prowling white vagrant, probably living well enough from charity scraps, tolerated vermin hardly worth



THE MOVIE DOG STAR GOES HOME AFTER WORK

the bother of exterminating. The only persons who actively disliked the cat were our landlady and the blackbirds: the landlady for no definite reason perhaps except splenetic human nature; the birds, somewhat larger than our blackbirds and faintly speckled with white, because they were nesting in our cypress-trees. There were two couples, and they took their baths perkily beneath the lawn-sprinkler on

## *Los Angeles—from a Bungalow Court*

watering days. We need have had no fear for the blackbirds' youngsters, for the parents outfaced the cat in a Jack the Giant-killer style. They hopped about her, enticing her to spring at them, they flew in circles over her head, they pounced upon her from the roof-ledge, curving upward at the critical moment. In fact, they played with her much as a bull-fighter harries the bull, tiring her out, and, at the first signs of a less speedy response, with spring or with claw, they flew in and planted sharp stabs with their beaks as they swooped by. After a few days of this aerial *corrida* the cat tired of the profitless chase and left the blackbirds in a possession so triumphant that they would swoop at the heads of human intruders.

The mocking-birds, who mock only in the archaic sense of the word, imitating the songs of other birds with a delightful variety and virtuosity, were more timid. They stole our guava flowers in the early morning and repaid us with a roundelay to the rising sun, until the daily tide of radios smothered the voice of Nature.

. . . . .

The grocer's wife learned that we had written books, and even had lectured to the Friday Morning Club. From that moment she flaunted Jo as a star customer, and, should any other 'regular' be purchasing, the groceress would lean her plump body across the counter and make a ceremonious introduction.

Fat and jolly the groceress was until the prevailing craze swept her from her balance and in a trice destroyed all her easy geniality. Determined to grow thin, she confined her diet to mere water alone, striving like the bear in winter-time to consume her own adipose, and reshape once more the form now hidden in the lump. This was indeed a penance to past appetite. The mariner starving on

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

his raft may be surrounded by visions of rich meats and drinks: she starved surrounded by such things in actuality. What a powerful force must stand behind the dictate of fashion that could make her suffer voluntarily these Midas's torments, in true Christian spirit counting her losses only as gains recorded ounce by ounce each day on her bathroom scales. But alas! her youth lay too profoundly buried. Even hunger's scalpel could not carve so deep, and after a month, in which she had more than set off by loss of geniality whatever charm of silhouette she might have recaptured in her own imagination, she gave up the struggle. To be frank, the casual eye could perceive but little difference.



CAT AND BLACKBIRDS

### Chapter III

#### THE ABSORPTION OF 'TALK'

MOST of Jo's other excursions at this time were public. She gave two exhibitions of our sketches and several free 'talks' at various clubs; and she had to submit to the talks of others. Though the actual giving of lectures is quite an amusing business, containing the pleasures of dominating a crowd, of finding verbal expression for one's thoughts, of shaping, wrapping up, and decorating the subject, and a half-theatrical dramatization of effect, we never could understand the pleasure derived from the other side: the passive, paying audience. The enthusiastic willingness to listen to lectures, lectures on any subject and of any quality, has already been remarked as a phenomenon peculiarly American. But the odd thing was that this was combined with an almost equally strong determination not to listen to anything once the lecturer had descended from the platform. Ladies, who would gaze up at a lecturer in mute and admiring silence for an hour and a half by the clock, would pour into his ears their psycho-analytic distresses once they could get grips on him, and, no matter what might be the treasures of his still unimparted information, would give him never an instant's pause in which he might resume.

On one occasion Jo was an honoured guest of the Friday Morning Club Art Section. A lady miniaturist was the *pièce de résistance*. She was a shy woman, slightly withered, and she stood on the platform speaking in a small voice which to the audience was almost as inaudible as her miniatures, ranged on a board at her side, were invisible.

"It is so *good* of you ladies," she said, smirking and moving

## Star-dust in Hollywood

head, body, and hands with awkward, timid gestures, "to want to know about *me* and *my* miniature-paintings. I'm sure I don't know *what* I can say to you about *them*, although, of course, *my* sitters *were* such interesting people. Now *this* gentleman, for instance," pointing vaguely, "oh, he *was* such



THE HIDDEN TREASURE

a nice man. He said to me: 'Miss H——, I've never been made a miniature of before.' Yes, he really said that. And I said: 'Oh, you only have to sit still, I do the rest.' And he laughed so much that I knew he *was* a really nice man. But it was most awkward. He would go to sleep. Oh! I was so worried about it. Do you know I had to drop things to wake him up. But he *was* such a nice . . . Oh, yes, and that one was such a nice young girl—I'm sure it was a pleasure indeed to have the privilege of . . ."

Thus she continued for twenty minutes. At last an air of anxiety showed in her face; she hesitated. . . .

"Oh," she cried suddenly, "I must show you *this* one though—it's *the* one I like best of all. In fact . . ." She began to fumble in the bosom of her dress, gripped a slender, gold chain, and began to haul on it as if drawing a bucket from a well. At last up came a tiny medallion, which she held at the level of her chin. "Oh, she *was* such a darling," the lady miniaturist cried. "Only two years old, and I used to say 'Peeky-Boo' to her *all* the time I was working, and it amused her so much. This is only a copy of the real one I did, her dear mother has *that*, of course. I just thought I'd have to show it to you, but . . ." A hint of confusion came

## *The Absorption of 'Talk'*

over her, and she hastily dropped it back into its warm repository.

On another occasion the chief lecturer was a Russian who could give the ladies of Los Angeles a number of rather mean, sordid details about the life of the late Tsar and Tsarina. After lunch he was followed by a high but impoverished princess on the subject of the Grand Duchess Anastasia. The princess had a truly royal bust decorated with a diamond star of some illustrious order ; her double chins and withered neck showed faintly through a scarf of purple tulle. She spoke English very imperfectly and read almost phonetically from notes grasped in white-gloved hands.

"Laties. I would haf-you-know that it gifs me-a-great-pleasure to gom biffor-you-to tell you what I can-tell you a-bout de Gran-duchess-Anastasie. I haf-know-de Grand-duchess-Anastasie since she vos a cheeld, an I would-haf-you-know dat if I see de Gran-duchess-Anastasie I can-tell-you vedda she de Grand-duchess-Anastasie or no. . . ."

"Can you make out what she is saying?" whispered the lady whom Jo had accompanied.

"Oh, yes, but then we've known quite a lot of this kind in Paris," said Jo.

"I can't understand a word," said her friend.

Now and again the notes of the princess became mixed ; from one page to another the sequence was incoherent. The princess had just enough English to perceive this, on which she swore to herself audibly in German somewhat thus :

"I dellyou, latis, inde summerof ninetee untret an tvelf I vos very-vell-acquaintet vit 'er 'orse vot she used to . . . Eh? Vass? Vass? Herr Gott. Very-vell-acquaintet vit 'er 'orse? Donnervetter . . . Vas it? . . . Ach! ya . . . summerof nintee untret an tvelf I vos veryvellacquainted vit de Granduchessanastasie. . . ."

The grand conclusion was thus :

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

“ An I dell you latis you prink os facetoface vit de Granduchessanastasia an I dell you true vedder de Granduchessanastasia iss de Granduchessanastasia or vedder she no.”

A moment later a look of astonishment and dismay struck the flattered appreciation of the applause from her face. Her papers flew from her hand in an agitated cascade, the Herr Gotts, Herr Jes, and Donnerwetters exploded undisguised on the startled air. She swept the tulle from her princely bosom and gesticulated; the diamond cross of the Grand Order of Something-or-other had disappeared. Stories of the ventures of American crooks flashed through Jo's mind. The scene threatened to assume the proportions of that so brilliantly described in *The Jackdaw of Rheims*:

There's a cry and a shout, And a deuce of a rout,  
And nobody seems to know what they're about,  
But the monks have their pockets all turned inside out;  
The friars are kneeling, And hunting, and feeling  
The carpet, the floor, and the walls, and the ceiling. . . .  
And the Abbot declared that “when nobody twigged it,  
Some rascal or other had popped in and prigged it!”

Luckily, just before matters had reached such a pitch, the star was discovered. In some mysterious and unexplained way, possibly dislodged by her agitation into the mixed papers, it had slipped off and was caught by its pin on the underside of the chair on which she was sitting.

“Now,” whispered Jo's friend, as soon as the excitement had calmed, “let's go and shake hands with the princess.”

“Why?” asked Jo. “I think she seems very dull.”

“But,” cried her friend, shocked, “don't you want to *know* the princess?”

Once Jo found herself in a rather absurd situation. Invited as the guest of honour and principal speaker to a dinner given by the California Art Society, she found that, by error, another guest of honour and principal speaker was present. He was a large and very professional art critic who had

## *The Absorption of 'Talk'*

discovered a 'Greco' which he wished to sell to the city. Suddenly he turned on Jo, who had been placed between himself and the president.

"You know *I* am the guest of honour here," he said, "but I am puzzled to know why you should have been placed between the president and myself."

Jo felt that she could not reveal to him that she too was the guest of honour; the disclosure might have spoiled his meal.

"Oh," she said, "I'm a bit of a specialist myself."

"Indeed!" replied the professor, with the light condescension of the superior male. "What subject, may I ask?"

"Feet," said Jo.

The gentleman looked astonished.

"Er—pedicure?" he ventured.

"No," replied Jo, "pedestrian. I can tell you what to use in your boots so that you can walk twenty miles a day without blistering. The Tyroleans, for instance, use stag's fat; the French soldiers break eggs in their shoes, push their bare feet in, and walk the eggs into omelettes; that makes your boots quite waterproof. The Lapps, on the other hand, use hay, quite good too if you have the right kind of hay. . . ."

When the time came she gave them a brisk account of our adventures with a donkey that must have made the poor professor's eulogy and analysis of his Greco, to an audience which possibly had never seen a real Greco, nor knew clearly who Greco was, sound somewhat ponderous.

One day the telephone rang, and a strange voice said:

"This is the president of the Hollywood Breakfast Club. May I request the pleasure of Mr and Mrs Gordon as guests of honour to our club? A car will be sent on the 15th instant at 7.30 A.M."

"Seven-thirty!" cried Jo, as the telephone was rung off. "What an hour to be convivial and listen to lectures!"

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

Then I believe our charman uttered his dictum that these people "hare barbarians."

But 7.30 came and eight o'clock approached before the car arrived. A negro chauffeur hurried to the door and panted out that the delay had been caused by a Mr Jockey, or some such name. Opposite our tiger-striped entrance Jo found a glittering Rolls-Royce, into which a rather portly gentleman bowed her with true European ceremony. However, his preliminary politeness did not prevent him from interrupting Jo in the middle of a phrase.

"Whose car is this?" he said abruptly.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Jo, and enclosed herself in an annoyed silence.

To break the very perceptible ice the gentleman tried to talk of aeroplanes.

"Oh, are you interested in aeroplanes?" asked Jo.

The man stared at her in amazement. His eyebrows lifted, he raised himself visibly in his seat, thrust his hand into his coat, after the well-known model of Napoleon on the *Bellerophon*, and said slowly and distinctly:

"I am Mr Fokker."

He had become accustomed to the cries of enthusiasm, the flush of compliments, the passionate desire to grasp his hand which had hitherto followed this announcement, and he had prepared himself to accept graciously. Jo, however, laughed and exclaimed:

"Then here you meet one of your greatest enemies."

The effect was startling. Mr Fokker cramped himself spasmodically into his corner. In the shadow of the car his face seemed to blanch. We suppose he may have thought here is a mad Englishwoman who will take immediate revenge for the bombing of London. Jo tried to explain her joke by saying that our enmity was purely theoretical; that while he was striving for greater and yet greater speeds we, with

## *The Absorption of 'Talk'*

our little donkey, had been christened by the *Petit Parisien* "*les recordmen de la lenteur.*" But Mr Fokker was not to be appeased. Now, in turn, he held an indignant silence till the entrance of the Breakfast Club was reached.

The British Navy has, we understand, a humane ordinance which commands that no officer shall address another officer except on matters of pure routine before eleven o'clock in the morning. What grotesque hypertrophy of the gregarious impulse could have dictated the inception of this Breakfast Club? Surely here the clotting instinct had assumed its most incredible aspect. The place reminded Jo strongly, in its aspect and its members, of her real estate outing to the Maori hut. The place was the Maori hut multiplied fifty-fold: trestle-tables and benches were massed under rustic awnings of bamboo and reed; the members, if they were not all real estate salesmen, looked like the people that an imagination leaning a little toward caricature depicts as typical real estate salesmen, here collected a hundred or more strong, seriously intent on pre-business jollity, jollity by rote from a printed card. A resolute facetiousness shone through a hundred spectacles—square spectacles, hexagonal spectacles, octagonal spectacles, oval and round spectacles, gold, silver, and tortoiseshell. Padded shoulders bumped one another in rhythm as the Los-Angeles-cum-Hollywood Babbitts chanted an opening chorus which contained a strange reference to being "seasick crossing to Dover." And when all had been served with thick plates on which ham and fried eggs were piled they had to stand erect and, clapping one another boisterously on the shoulder, had to shout a familiar greeting: "Hello, Ham!" To which the reply was: "Hello, Egg!"

Few can have realized how horridly appropriate the greetings seemed to the cold, unfacetious observer.

An orchestra with tuneless jazz stimulated the consumption

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

of the ham-and-egg orgy. Then a lettered board was raised, and, with the conductor pointing to line after line with his stick, the massed and half-riotous realtors, go-getters, business- and he-men of Los Angeles chanted vociferously the following rubric :

F, V, F, M [If we have ham] ;  
O, S, V, F, M [Oh, yes, we have ham] ;  
N, V, F, X [And we have eggs] ;  
O, S, V, F, X [Oh, yes, we have eggs] ;  
O, I, C, V, F, M, N, X [Oh, I see, we have ham and eggs] ;

while microphones on the table broadcast to the listening millions in the bungalow courts of Los Angeles and Hollywood, in the adobe houses of the desert, in the farm-houses of the irrigated valleys, in the hotels and mansions of Santa Barbara and Mount Carmel, even as far as San Francisco or Mexico the uncouth rejoicings of the modern makers of Los Angeles.

Jo had no right to be frivolous with Mr Fokker. She was but *a* guest of honour, he was *the* guest of honour. He had to stand before the microphone and 'tell the world,' while Jo, with the other guests of honour, had merely to rise from her seat and bow as her name and title to renown was read aloud amid frantic but indiscriminate applause.

"Mr William H. Jones, owner of the famous Jones drug-stores." (*Bow. Applause.*)

"Mr Henry K. Williams, inventor of the famous Williams Tyre Patch." (*Bow. Applause.*)

"Mrs Cora J. Gordon, famous European vagabond and authoress." (*Bow. Applause.*)

"Mr Joseph Breitenschwanz, proprietor of the famous Breiten abdominal belt." (*Bow. Applause.*) And so on.

The company then moved into a concert-hall, where a troupe of girl dancers waved their naked limbs about, thus bringing this whole grotesque gathering to a natural climax.

## *The Absorption of 'Talk'*

And then in a really jolly frame of mind the massed lawyers, doctors, realtors, oil-magnates, orange-merchants, hotel-keepers, and automobile-salesmen crowded to their cars and drove into the town to continue the jolly task of boosting to more vertiginous heights the fame of the greatest city in the world.

. . . . .

The easy superlative is still as prevalent as it was in the days of Dickens, more prevalent perhaps, though the clamour of advertisement and publicity campaigns has destroyed almost all sense of values. The immediate thing is the only one that has worth; only the novel is interesting. For instance, every new film is proclaimed at once as Hollywood's greatest achievement. Had we wished, after my convalescence, to book more lectures in California we could with difficulty have done so (the prophet has no honour while lodging in your own country). We should have been compelled to return to New York, fill our programme from thence, and come back with a new flourish of journalistic trumpets. The indiscriminate use of lavish praise was well illustrated to us on a rather important occasion, the first serious lecture which we had given at the Brooklyn Institute some six months earlier. We were nervous. We had tried only a few, tentative, semi-private lectures, including some at negro colleges in the South. The Brooklyn audience had the reputation of much experience and severe criticism. A lucky accident saved us. The introducer ushered us on to the platform, sat us in chairs, and then, turning to the large hall, began his opening eulogy:

"Ladies and gentlemen. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you our lecturers for to-night. I am sure you will all agree with me that we may expect a very great treat. The names of these two are practically household words wherever the idea of travelling is honoured at its true value. I shall

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

not be understating matters if I say that our lecturers for to-night have opened up new horizons for travellers and have shown us new aspects of foreign study. Their books are the ornaments of every well-stocked library in America. In fact, I feel that I should not take up a moment more of your time than is absolutely necessary, and now have the greatest pleasure in introducing to you this world-famous couple, Mr and Mrs . . . ahem! . . . Mr and Mrs . . . Mr and Mrs . . . oh! what are your names?"

The lecture-agent in New York had been a little coy of us: so many English lecturers of late had been unsatisfactory; the big names did not always guarantee an effective presence on the platform or a carrying voice. Of many a poet we should reverse the first rule for Victorian children: "They should be seen but not heard." But after we had enticed the agent to a New York flat and had got him prancing like a bear round the room to the throb of a Spanish farouka we knew that he was won. In fact, next day he invited us to play to his staff in the office, where he celebrated the event by sending out for ice-cream, which was served all round. In the middle of this impromptu feast two of the sternest of club women stalked in. The lecture-agent at once introduced his new discovery, ourselves. They inspected us from head to foot with the critical eyes of a housewife examining a fowl on the poulterer's stall.

"Of course," they said, "you do it in costume."

"Certainly not," we retorted.

However, without costume we had by now managed to lecture our way across to California; we had lectured to women's clubs, to musical and art societies, to a university, on a Sunday evening in a Unitarian church, at a Working-man's Institute. How or why some of these clubs or assemblies paid the fee of £30 for an hour-and-a-half talk was a mystery to us, although, on our part, after having paid the agent's

## *The Absorption of 'Talk'*

royalty and the railway and hotel expenses the profits were not large. In fact, on one occasion we found ourselves £2 out of pocket. A curious fact was impressed upon us. The lecturer was expected to take his money, deliver the goods, and go. Delivering the goods usually included, beside the lecture, a shaking-hands ceremony, to which any member of the club had a right, sometimes a banquet, and often a motor-car tour of the remarkable sights of the town. It was held as treachery on the part of the lecturer should he, returning home, make any criticisms of the country. He must have neither likes nor dislikes, nor travel with his eyes open. The highest indignation was always expressed at those who "come here to get our money and then go back and knock us." America may and does criticize England or Europe to its heart's content. Europe must not criticize America. American criticism of Europe comes from superiority; European criticism of America rises in 'jealousy,' a very different matter.

And if a lecturer were sufficiently notorious the women's clubs would be willing to submit to almost any impertinence. The massed clubs of Los Angeles were eager to hear Count Keyserling; delegates wrote to his secretary for terms and received the following answer:

Count Keyserling's fee for a lecture is £200, but before acceptance on his part he insists on the following conditions:

He must be met at the railway-station by a nice young girl, no old women on any account, and he must be conducted forthwith to a quiet private house (not an hotel).

He must be given dinner at least an hour and a half before the lecture, and at the dinner must be served with a good bottle of wine of a recognized European brand, not champagne.

He must not be expected to shake hands with old women on any account.

## *Chapter IV*

### LOS ANGELES—REAL ESTATE

**A**MONG the guests at the groceress's supper-party was a woman who lived by touting for the real estate business. Her duty was to scour the town for newly arrived 'tourists,' the word 'tourist' in the Los Angeles sense meaning merely a visitor from some other state. The 'tourist' when discovered was then to be tempted, by means of free drives round Los Angeles and Hollywood, free peeps at a movie studio, or at films describing the making of a movie, free lunches, to visit one of the real estate propositions which infested almost every square yard of unbuilt-on land within the four hundred or more square miles of Los Angeles city. For fourteen miles in every direction the flat lands and their enclosing semicircle of hills sported villas of every hue and every variety of architecture. Huge signs announced "This is Hollywood Land," "Come and live on Booster Hills," and at night gigantic announcements in electric lights, either stable or winking at one with a sly monotony, prevented the 'tourist' from ever forgetting that this Los Angeles was destined to be the greatest city on earth. In a way some of the less developed parts of the hills were not without a charm at first sight, the white, pink, yellow, green, blue, or orange houses, each with their conventional piece of green turf in front, sprouted up here and there along the concrete development roads which divided the dried-up waste into squares and segments of unchanging yellow-brown. But the mind staggered with horror at the vision of the real estate salesman's ideal, when every plot shall have been bought up, and the whole area packed with a monotonous mass of undistin-

## *Los Angeles—Real Estate*

guished dwellings, when every corner shall have bred its gasoline-station, though each may strive for the prize offered by the city to the most beautiful, and when every block shall have its 'drive-in' grocer's shop and every few hundred yards its armoured-cement place of worship.

At the moment the real estate business was not in a very flourishing condition. The boom had expanded and had 'bust.' Los Angeles was in the curious position of being a town without any real reason for existence. It was a town that advertised loudly its charms and virtues yet had almost nothing to offer the expectant immigrant. It was in reality a town of refuge for the retired farmers of Iowa and the Middle West, who, fleeing from the horror of the monotony of their great, echoless wheat plains, found by contrast an infinite variety in the crazy, domestic, gregarious monotony of Los Angeles.

Already there were some eighty thousand workmen unemployed in the place, and their opinion of Los Angeles was best expressed by a poem which our bootmaker, an Englishman, told us of. He could not find a copy. But later the garage man's daughter typed us this from one in the possession of a friend.

(This letter was submitted by Tom Marshall, of Hollywood, to the *Los Angeles Times* in a prize competition to boost Los Angeles. He did not get an award.)

### CALIFORNIA

Oh, come to the land of the Western Sun,  
Where every business is overdone,  
Where the stores charge freight on the goods made here ;  
If you ask them the reason they think you're queer.

Where the cows eat barley instead of hay,  
And the cream gets lost in the Milky Way.  
The grape-fruit here is something fine,  
A cross between a melon and a pumpkin rind. . . .

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

The greenwood fries in the sultry breeze,  
The sand storms blow and the oranges freeze,  
The Movie Stars marry twice a year  
And would marry again if the road was clear.

So tune up your flivver and start for the West,  
Where jobs are scarce and the pay is less ;  
Bring all your cash and plenty of clothes,  
Where you'll get any more the Lord only knows. . . .

TOM MARSHALL

The consequence was that every real estate firm, in an agony of cut-throat competition, was trying to catch every 'tourist' as he arrived with his savings, to induce him if possible to invest his money in land before he could discover the real conditions. All along the streets near the centre of the town large rubber-neck wagons waited to abduct the wandering visitor. Young and often charming women pounced upon one from doors waving prospectuses and promising free drives, free lunches, and the rest. Already in our bungalow we had been 'spotted' as 'tourists,' and the real estate touts pounced upon us almost as insistently as the paper-sellers. We had heard unpleasant rumours about the methods of the land-agents. High-pressure salesmanship, hypnotic but illusionary prospects, unfortunate visitors induced to put the greater part of their savings into land purchase on the instalment system, only to find that rates, taxes, part payments for the introductions of roads, pavements, water, gas, and electric light so overwhelmed them that at last the land had to be forfeited and they lost everything.

Jo was tired enough of 'going driving.' We had driven some six thousand miles during the previous summer in the "Happy Hearse." . . . She hated sightseeing in crowds. But she was willing to become a wary fly on the spider's invitation, so she accepted at last the offer of a firm that promised a view of the Hollywood Bowl, lunch in a Maori hut where cinema stars habitually refreshed themselves, and

## *Los Angeles—Real Estate*

some vague allusions to having as neighbours Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford. She expected a tour in a char-à-banc, and had already imagined herself studying the psychology of the Middle Western farmer and his wife on a real estate jaunt.

Instead, on the appointed morning a young man, corpulent and flabby, with unintelligent eyes, pressed the bell.

"Mrs Cora J. Gordon?" he asked. "Well, I've called for you in my car to show you over that piece of real estate you were thinking of."

The car was a shabby Ford, which clattered along waving its mudguards in a rather helpless fashion like an old woman sure she will lose the train. It emphasized our social position. Having a permanent address, we were perhaps a little too promising to be massed with herded casuals in a char-à-banc; but, having so modest an address, we were worth neither Buick nor genius at salesmanship. The dweller in a fifty-dollar-per-month bungalow is rated as an individual of probably simple mind and easy game.

In spite of the fact that the man hardly looked up to the standard of the minimum wage-earner, he carried an air of careless superiority, having imagined himself as the great America he-salesman hero, and as he drove Jo along straight road after straight road, bordered everywhere with grass plots, thin palms, aloes, and bungalow courts, he talked, rather like a schoolboy who has learned his lesson clumsily, of the marvels he was going to show her, the world necessity of making one's residence in Los Angeles, the speculative wisdom of investing in land, the delight of living within your own investment and looking after it, and, above all, on the publicity value of having the Fairbanks as neighbours. "You'll find them just lovely folks," he said impressively. "Say, though, that's the entrance to the Hollywood Bowl, but I guess we haven't got time to go in there now."

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

Having run through his lesson, he began over again. Jo was well aware that when she wished to impress a thing on her charwoman she always told her three times, but objected to finding herself rated at the same mental level. So when she saw the third round of rote developing she changed the conversation.

"What did you do before this?" she asked.

"Eh?" he asked, rather startled, and eyeing her for the first time.

Jo repeated her question.

The man bridled. By this question the woman had evidently been impressed by his personality. He spread his chest and tried to look as sheik-like as driving a Ford will allow, and with a few throaty preliminaries said:

"Why, before this I was . . . ahem! . . . a Wild West rider working for the pictures."

Jo looked at his flaccid face and pretended to believe.

"But why did you leave such an interesting job for this?" she asked.

Taken aback, he stammered, and muttered rather incoherently of the solid and marvellous future for those who succeeded in the real estate business.

"Anyway, here," he went on, with evident relief, "is the Maori hut."

The Maori hut struck a very flat note. It was a circular, straw-thatched barn standing off a road, and was in a deserted quarter surrounded by desolate-looking lots and advertisement-boards—the last place to be frequented by pampered movie stars in search of either sensation or convenience. In the gloom Jo at once recaptured all the sensations of a Sunday-school treat. Long trestle-tables were arranged round a platform with a blackboard. Shabby negro waiters were offering the assembled victims thick mugs of tepid coffee and slab-like sandwiches of spongy bread containing a lettuce

## *Los Angeles—Real Estate*

leaf apiece. Her fellow 'tourists' appeared to be mostly dismal and Fundamentalist farmers' widows longing to eke out their last years in the Californian sunshine. One woman was different. Tall, well dressed, and with an amused twinkle, she smiled to Jo and settled down with a notebook. They were lectured as they ate. A man with open, 'you-may-all-trust-me' eyes and a black coat of clerical and dependable-looking cut stood on the platform in their midst and began to talk, inscribing gradually mounting figures on the black-board, with the evident hope that the apple-pie they were now munching would become inextricably mingled with the 'apple-sauce' he was offering, and the two would be digested together. Fabulous figures piled up before the eyes of those gaping women. Stories of successful speculators made them tingle with desire. The word 'success' rouses the American as the trumpet-call revives the worn-out war-horse; rendered susceptible in the highest degree to word-hypnotism by the advertisements dinned daily and weekly into their eyes, they are ever ready to respond. The mystic word 'courage' coupled with 'success' bears down their timidity; for always the successful speculator has shown courage. Vision, opportunity, and faith all took their parts and flattered the humble ears of the victims. They had come to California expecting to find golden opportunities; they had faith in large quantities; and who is so dumb to imagination's appeal that she is not conscious within herself of the possession of vision?

The lecture over, there was a rush for the door. Now they were to be led, or driven, to the fields of opportunity. Jo's conductor was evidently the least important, or the least pushing, which is the same thing: she had to wait till the last. The procession moved off headed by a Buick car, the chauffeur of which was a man with permanently waved hair, tortoiseshell spectacles, and an expensive English tweed

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

suit ; behind him sat the humorous-looking woman with her notebook.

The sun beat down upon them. Life seemed bearable only while the cars were in movement, but policy dictated long rests in sweltering spots.

"There are the lots," said Jo's conductor, sweeping his hand with an easy gesture over the view of a hill-side divided into sections not one of which contained a level piece of ground.

"See," he continued, pointing to the dim distance in which could be seen a roof showing over massed trees. "Right there is where Doug and Mary live ; isn't that fine?"

In a town of four hundred square miles one might perhaps have called the distant Fairbanks mansion neighbouring, but Jo wondered what charms the farmers' widows could extract from staring every morning with a spy-glass at a roof, even though it covered heads howsoever eminent.

"Now," said the ex-cowboy, "what priced lot was you thinking of buying?"

Jo hesitated. She wanted to say that, having been continually called up, visited, and generally badgered by real estate companies for a month, she was now taking it out in a free ride and lunch. But that might have cut short the experience.

"Look here," she replied, "if we are ordered to stay in Los Angeles we may buy a lot. If not we are going home."

He stared at her.

"Home to where?" he asked.

"Europe," said Jo.

"Europe!" exclaimed the man. "Do you mean to say that after having seen Los Angeles you can bear to think of going back to Europe?"

"Oh, quite easily," said Jo.

## *Los Angeles—Real Estate*

He looked at her and blew a breath of disbelief. He knew all about Europe. It was a lousy place, except for the drink. She was 'kidding' him. . . .

"Anyway, you don't have to live on it," he said at last. "Just invest and watch your money grow."

Jo was feeling desperate. The Ford had now been standing for a quarter of an hour in the sun, and the interior was like an oven. So she fixed on £200 as a suitable price. He turned at once from the bigger lots and drove her to a corner which looked suitable as a refuse-ground for tin cans. It seemed to Jo that, when built, all these houses would be like animals sitting on their haunches three steps up, with their forepaws stretched down to the ground. Such houses abound in Hollywood. From the road they look like bungalows, but from the opposite hill they show as three- or four-storey buildings, plenty of stairs for the tired housewife, and in the garden the owners would have to become like the fabulous Rocky Mountain goat that grows its legs on one side longer than the other.

There were sites that would have needed a climb of fifty or a hundred steps from the road. Jo explained that this would hardly be suitable for a husband with a heart.

"Oh, the architects will see to all that," said the ex-cowboy; but he didn't explain how. Then Jo found that any house built on the estate must be designed by the company's architect, and either in the French-*château*, the old-English-cottage, or the Mexican-villa style.

"If you're able to do a bit of climbing," he said, "we might go up this hill and look down at some nice lots that have trees already on them."

Jo, who realized that the man had been putting her to slow and deliberate torture in order to confuse her mind and make her commit herself, now counted on her revenge.

"Right ho!" she said, and went up that hill at a pace

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

that made her calves ache. Puffing and blowing, he struggled after her.

"Didn't know you were a Marathon racer," he panted at the top.

"I told you I was a good walker," said Jo. "Did you think I was bluffing?"

He sank on to a stone and mopped his purple neck. A sense of shame, or perhaps the memory of his claim to be a rough-rider, had made him hurry. Jo regarded his scarlet face and protuberant eyes with compunction, but reminded herself of the stories we had heard of real estate swindles and of the knowledge that this one also was, if not fraudulent, at least part of a general misstatement of values.

"Now I've seen all I want," she said. "That thousand-dollar lot in the corner [the can-dump] attracts me—at least, it attracts our pockets. I'll tell my husband about it." The salesman brightened up. He was now the tortured one and wanted to go home. He drove quickly down the corkscrew road, passing other real estate men still in the toils of persuasion, who looked at the cowboy with raised and inquiring eyebrows.

"Soon I shall be home, and that will be that," thought Jo, pressing her throbbing temples. But they stopped once more at the Maori hut. She had not noticed that behind were small offices, and there all the old, tired women had been ranged in a sweltering group under the questionable shelter of a few straggling bamboos. "We all got to wait here," they said, "and one by one folks is taken into that office." "And the Lord help you when you get there," whispered a shrewd-faced woman to me. "High-pressure salesmanship they call it. You'll see."

An hour passed. The bamboos gave just enough shade to prevent sunstroke. At last Jo's turn came. She remembered former college triumphs in amateur theatricals and made a

## *Los Angeles—Real Estate*

bustling entry as a managing matron. "Good day!" she said, taking enough breath to swim eighteen strokes under water. "I have surveyed your property, weighed its merits, considered my capital, have noted down my favourite, must consult my husband, would like to have its number and name, am anxious to know furthermore how liable we should be for rates, taxes, lamp-posts, gutters, roadways, sidewalks, gas, electric light, water, and drains. After that if we decide to live in California we may consider that lot. If not, nothing will induce us to invest. Put my name down to have it reserved for a few days? No, I think I'll take my chance. Thank you!"

The high-pressure salesman looked a little dazed. He gave Jo a few details, glossing glibly over the lamp-posts and so on. She swaggered out.

"How quick you've been!" cried the assembled victims under the bamboos. The ex-cowboy whispered uneasily to a strong-jawed real estate *confrère*. "Why," thought Jo, "should I sit here any longer and be bored?" The old landladies were nodding with sleep. A kind of dreary hypnotism was evidently being practised. The real estate men had probably taken lessons from the magnetic personalities who advertised in the *Saturday Evening Post* and other papers: "You want success"—pictures of men with hawk-like eyes and commanding fingers.

Evidently there were other methods—that of sex appeal, for instance. The rough-rider picked a long strand of grass and playfully tickled the end of Jo's nose. As if accustomed to have the end of her nose tickled by strangers, Jo made no comment. Luckily she did not sneeze, for that would have created too intimate a bond.

The sheikh method was hardly proving successful, but the man belonged to the large insensitive majority which does not know when to stop. A few minutes later he remarked:

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

"There's a nice, smart-looking little piece of goods sitting next to me." Jo looked round quickly, anxious to see some new face, anything to vary the monotony, but suddenly realized that she was the piece of goods referred to. But neither having her nose tickled nor being paid compliments brought her to the point of buying. A sudden naughty thought tempted her to rouse all the poor old victims from their heat-induced lethargy. Some months in the States had taught her the power of the 'talk.' So, without much preliminary, she gave them all a lecture about the Serbian retreat. They roused themselves and were beginning to listen with real interest and enthusiasm. Forgotten were all the calculations about kitchens, dining-rooms, and bathrooms. The real estate salesmen were aghast. Jo had ruthlessly broken the spell that long experience had proved to weaken sales resistance.

"Take her home at once," murmured the head man to the rough-rider, and in five minutes she was being whirled back, the old Ford flapping its mudguards more despairingly than ever.

"When will you know about your plans?" asked the rough-rider, as he set Jo down under the tigerish archway.

"From my experience to-day I'm very much afraid that the Californian sun will be too hot for my husband," said Jo.

Some weeks later a rich woman was brought to see us. Jo happened to tell some of her experiences.

"Where did you go?" asked the woman. "Oh, that's one of our propositions, but it's a terribly second-rate affair. You ought to go on one of our swell real estate tours."

. . . . .

The real estate men do not always get the best of the deal. On one occasion they caught our friend, Lewis Brown, and induced him to pay a deposit of £400 on an expensive lot

## *Los Angeles—Real Estate*

in an ambitious exploitation. Next day Brown regretted his decision and decided to ask for the return of his money. The chief realtor smiled grimly at the simplicity of the author's request.

"Now, wait a minute before you make your decision," said Brown. "Do you know with whom you are dealing? I am an author."

"Glad to hear it," said the realtor jeeringly. "You'd better write a story for the *Sat'dy Ev'ning Post* 'n get your money back that way."

"Wait a minute," said Brown. "Now an author is a man who invents plots. He is, in fact, an ingenious person. I mean he uses his wits. This proposition of yours is expensive, you want to attract the best people to it. I can be very unpleasant if I want to be. For instance, you do much of your best business on Sundays, I think. Oddly enough I happen to have a number of negro friends in this town. I might organize Sunday picnics with these friends to my lot. We might spend the day there, playing the banjo, singing, and dancing. After all, it is my lot, isn't it? That's the first idea, one that just popped into my head, but if I bothered about it I could . . . Let me see now, we might . . ."

"Aw! Cut it out," interrupted the realtor angrily. "You win, Mr Brown. . . . Only be a white man and for God's sake don't tell anybody else that we've given you your money back. . . ."

Yet Californian business men affect to despise authors.

. . . . .

As my convalescence proceeded we were able to take longer excursions in our old car and explore the mystery of Los Angeles-cum-Hollywood's charms. We failed to solve them. Northward we had to drive twenty miles to be free of the interminable succession of raw villa towns, bungalow

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

courts, real estate promoters, and gasoline-stations. Westward, through twelve miles of almost continuously inhabited areas, we reached the sea, with its ten-mile front of imitation Coney Islands, hotel esplanades, and beach clubs; southward for thirty miles the other incidents of small villa holdings were alternated with oil-wells and petroleumized desolation; south-eastward, along the flank of the Sierra Madre, one could drive for almost sixty miles among raw towns and hot-dog stalls. Even beyond the town limits advertisements on farms and houses showed the commercial spirit. Oranges—Figs—Home-made Soups—Rhode Island Red Chicks—Peppers—Puppies—Encino, Watch It Grow—Pruning and Tree-surgery—Eggs—Honey—Concord Grapes—See Movie Animal in Person—Cocoanut Ice—Mahjong Teacher—Voice Placement—Grape Juice—Prunes—and a petrol-station every five minutes without intermission. In fact, no one who had only an hour or two to spare could possibly shake himself free from the city, with its crude, eye-aching newness. Almost every valley, canyon, or hump within fifteen miles of the City Hall was placarded with real estate advertisements, and although in certain lights the golden hill-sides, dotted with their variegated and would-be art houses, sliced and contoured by their cement roads, had a certain picturesque quality, a painter's picturesqueness rather than one of charm, in the mind's eye we could only reflect on what this place would be like when the full flood of house-building had swept over and had buried them wholly two storeys deep.

## *Chapter V*

### HOLLYWOOD—FIRST DAYS ON THE MOVIE LOT

*D*ISTANCE is of small account in a city that owns one car for every two and a half inhabitants, including babies, and so the cinema studios have dispersed about the country to cheaper plots of land. Only one important studio, the Paramount, remains in the centre of Hollywood. Most of the others have drifted ten or fifteen miles into the country and have begun to build up centres of their own, such as Culver City round the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, or Universal City round the studio of that name. In the wide-spreading firmament of Los Angeles and Hollywood the studios are comparatively as far apart as the sun from his satellites.

Among the unending repetition of flamboyant domestic architecture, among the lodging-houses, bungalow courts, community dwellings, and so on, aping every architectural ingenuity or lunacy from the child's story-book Arabian Nights style to the mere painted wooden shack, the studios can hardly hope to strike any distinctive note. They may cover extensive areas of ground, but their fronts are hardly imposing. The M.G.M., false-fronted with Attic colonnades of plaster Corinthian, is noteworthy, since the Greek style has been little used in this warm corner of the Pacific coast, where perhaps the Greek would have been most in harmony. The De Mille studio, an overgrown colonial mansion, might easily be mistaken for a polytechnic school or an orphan asylum; Charlie Chaplin's, in Staple Inn style, looks like a communal lodging-house—surely his sense of humour went awry this time—and the Paramount, a Californian develop-

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

ment of what the local architect imagines to be a Mexican palace, might equally be an electric-light station or a furniture-store. But the Paramount owns a huge half of a full-sized ocean-going liner, and from it, towering over the roofs of the surrounding bungalows, you may suspect that here is, at last, a genuine movie studio. Then you may note the regiments of cars mustered on the fifteen-cent parking-stations which are occupying the unbuilt-on plots of ground wedged in between the bare-brick roots of the tall blocks of flats or the bougainvillea-covered bungalows; or you may note the untidy eating-shacks of wood and chicken-wire that scrape a meagre living by soothing with coffee, coco-cola, hot dog, or sandwich the spirits of expectant or rejected applicants for work. But America is not truly a democratic country. Across the road are other parking-stations, no better than the fifteen-cent ones, yet twice as dear, where the glittering Rolls-Royces or the Cadillacs of the stars or magnates can await the return of their masters, uncontaminated by contact with the dusty flivvers of the casual extras.

And yet, except for the regiments of cars, little led us to imagine that here was one of the biggest corporations that ruled America's fourth greatest industry. There was no traffic on the street, no bustle; an almost Sunday-like quiet reigned; a public library might well have seemed busier.

Our friend led us through the Spanish portal into an ante-room. Here too the same sense of quietude was remarkable. The dim hall was panelled in dark oak, and felt unwelcoming. On either side were red plush settles, and just opposite the main entrance was a bow-windowed office flanked on either side by doors. In this office sat a young clerk. His hair was polished, his collar and tie as near star-like perfection as could be achieved with cheap means; his shoulders were carefully moulded; a sleek and tailored Cerberus whose habitual expression had already grown into an unspoken

## *Hollywood—First Days on the Movie Lot*

statement: "Whatever you want you can't do it. I've seen dozens of your sort before. Don't think you are going to fool me into letting you past."

On the red plush bench at one side sat two good-looking girls, their faces already a little drawn with holding up the expectant expression, their silk-sheened legs primly parallel with muted anxiety. The one-headed Cerberus scowled at our friend.

"Wadjer want?" he grunted ungraciously.

"Mr Ornitz," said our friend distinctly.

"Whad say?"

"Mr Ornitz. He's expecting me. My name is Brown, Lewis Brown."

"Wad name?"

"Lewis Brown."

Reluctantly the youth picked up a telephone.

"Thad Mr Ornitz? Somebody named Brown . . . says you . . . Oh! All right, then."

Grudgingly he filled in three pink slips on which were printed in prominent letters: "Only valid for person indicated. Does not allow bearer on sets."

He fumbled under the desk. A harsh buzzer clattered an accompaniment as the left-hand door slowly opened; no chance of any sly dog slipping by that entrance unsuspectedly. No doubt, in view of the unsnubbable impudence of the genuine go-getter or journalist, the studios had been obliged to erect such defences. The two girls watched us enviously through the magic portal. Each time we passed, as we did often in the future, one or two persons were usually waiting thus, girls who had met some *employé* at a party, men with portfolios or rolls of paper. Each day there were a few trying by some excuse to slip through that buzzing door, trying to break into the movie lot, convinced that fame and fortune awaited them on the other side. That sleek young

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

Cerberus must have been an expert on sex appeal. Each day the passionately desirous of America's film aspirants must have practised their wiles on him, the imperious, the seductive, the dewy, the plaintive. . . . What ruby lips must have tempted, what strange perfumes filled his cage? He must have been equally an expert in male manœuvres; the confidential man breathed chewing-gum-freighted messages



THE SINGLE-HEADED CERBERUS

into his ear; the breezy man tried to clasp his honest hand; the impudent man pretended to be somebody he was not. But young Cerberus had been hired for his heart of ice. He knew them all.

A narrow passage led us through the building into a big courtyard. On this side the Mexican palace had become an old-English timbered front. A garden, with carefully laid-out, box-lined walks, was centred round a fountain and ornamented the courtyard, one side of which was faced by an odd mixture of architectural styles.

"Stars' dressing-rooms," said Brown, waving his hand, "but all built so that they can be used for casual backgrounds."

Here the same emptiness was evident. Except for ourselves not a soul stirred; the place might have been deserted. Brown led us between factory-like sheds that were not for ornament; we passed into a narrow alley, on either side of which were tall, cream-coloured barns, big as airship sheds, on the huge doors of which were painted Stage 16, Stage 17. We passed on and came to a second alley, at the end of which we found a box-like building pierced with a hundred windows, over the entrance of which was a placard announcing "Stenographic Department."

## *Hollywood—First Days on the Movie Lot*

We walked down a narrow corridor. On either side at close intervals were set doors, with a name printed on each one. We climbed a narrow stair to the second floor; another narrow corridor here was set with similar doors and corresponding names.

"Authors," said Brown. "All this place is packed with authors trying their best to think out movie plots."

At one of these doors he tapped. The card on the door told us that here we might find Mr Ornitz at a similar intellectual occupation. A woman's voice bade us come in.

The room was about ten feet by twelve. Most of the space was taken up by a deep desk on which was a typewriter. The young woman was arranging a pile of papers. She was prettily finished for exhibition in the efficient business-girl's style which confesses that a woman's daily occupation depends as much on looks as on ability.

"Mr Ornitz has gone over to Miss Wynne's," she said.

"All the rooms in this building are similar," said Brown, as we retreated down the corridor. "Cubicles ten feet square with a typewriter; and a stenographer if necessary. In each one is an author, worrying his mind crazy to find an original movie plot. Sam Ornitz has been brought over here on a six-months trial. You know his great novel, of course. . . ."

We passed back through the gardened courtyard and into the timber-backed, Mexican-fronted house. Miss Wynne's room on the first floor was larger and more cheerful. She could look out on the movie garden for inspiration, while Mr Ornitz had to content himself with the blank back of a stage shed.

Three imported authors greeted our entrance. All were Jewish, and each had a distinctive character. Miss Wynne was the blonde type, which often shows how far the modern Jewish race has travelled from its Mosaic progenitors; Joseph Isaacs was the slender, young, intellectual Jew,

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

sardonic and cynical, with a bitter, glittering fancy like cut-glass; Sam Ornitz was short and thickset in type, but the quiet good humour in his eyes was matched by a comical curl at the corners of his expressive mouth. The conversation halted for a moment to include us and then swung on again. . . .

"How the devil did you get this room, Rita?" said Ornitz.

"It is half again as comfortable as any of ours."

"You have got to ask for things, Sam," said Miss Wynne, "especially if you're a woman. You had better put in for it when I go."

"You'll get it all right," said Isaacs. "You've had your story taken."

"Did you know that they are going to shoot one of mine at last?" said Miss Wynne. "It was just in time. I'm off next week.

I'm not going to renew. I can't stand this. Why, I've done them half a dozen good stories—in my own style, of course—but they don't seem to like them. Didn't they hire me on my style, anyway? So I got mad and turned them out a screaming movie plot. Young man running a milk-cart falls in love with a stenographer. She despises him, but at last she is conquered by true love . . . you know the stuff . . . and in the last scene he turns out to be the son of a millionaire who has quarrelled with his father. Yes, they took that one. Well, I'm not sorry. I'm going to make stories of all the ones they wouldn't take, and I've drawn my pay. Besides, before coming over here I made them agree



A HOLLYWOOD AUTHOR

## Hollywood—First Days on the Movie Lot

to give me a trousseau as well. 'Do you think that amongst all those stars in Hollywood I'm going to dress myself out of three hundred dollars a week?' I said to them in New York.

"At first I thought that I had some new stuff for the cinema. But they only *say* they want new stuff; they don't really mean it. I'm not even going to stop to see my thing shot."

Ornitz's eyes crinkled.

"We all have the idea that we can reform the movies," he said. "Otherwise probably we wouldn't come over. But once you have got your story past the continuity, and the director, and the supervisor . . ."

"Supervisor hell," interrupted Isaacs. "He looks at your script and says, 'Look here, I don't like that scene being set in New York, so we'll make it on a Tuesday instead!' Do you know when they are going to shoot your film, Sam?"

"Yes, as soon as Von Sternberg has finished *The Docks of New York*. That's fixed at last."

Miss Wynne pleaded an engagement. Isaacs, complaining of a hang-over, left us to search for an illicit pick-me-up; so we, with our friend and Ornitz, went down the stairs and across the courtyard.

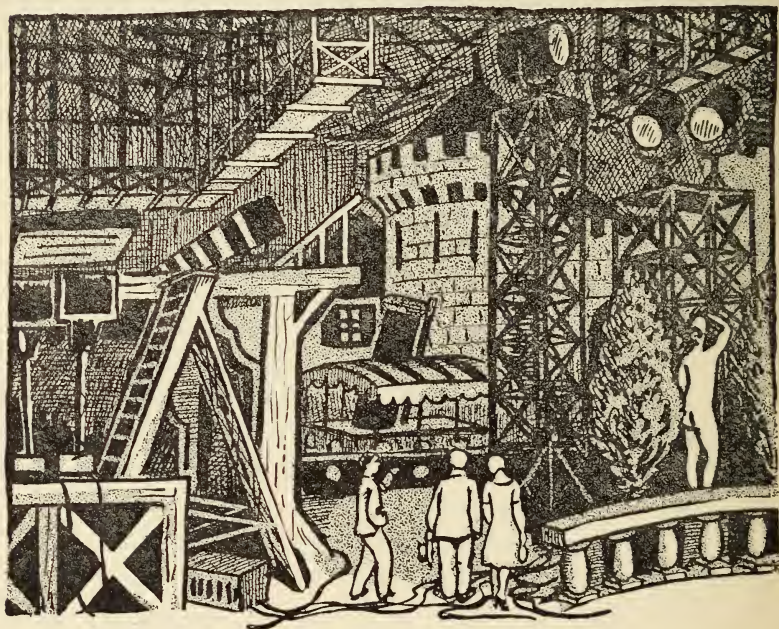
"Lewis has told me that you want to make some drawings of the movies at work," he said to us. "Now I'm going to introduce you to Von Sternberg. He is one of the most interesting of our younger directors. He shot that film *Underworld*. I've mentioned you to him already, and he will be delighted to let you watch him at work and draw as much as you like. . . ."

We passed between yet more huge stages, immense, empty shells of buildings which could hold several two-storeyed houses complete. They were closed by big green sliding

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

doors, but a smaller postern let us in and shut on us again.

Coming so suddenly from the brilliant Californian sunlight, we were blinded by the gloom, but gradually the huge objects round us became dimly visible. We might have imagined



INSIDE A 'STAGE'

ourselves in the anteroom of some fabulous story by H. G. Wells. Tall tripods supported great steel barrels; towers of lattice on wheels held up yet bigger cylinders; thin standards held oblong metal boxes from which projected rectangular trumpets; boxes of strange construction littered the floor, which was also decorated by sprawling lines and coils of thick and thin tubing.

"Don't trip over the spaghetti," Ornitz warned us.

We could just perceive that we were in a maze of

## *Hollywood—First Days on the Movie Lot*

intermingled and incomplete architecture, halves of rooms sometimes built inside other and larger rooms, a Bowery boarding-house bedroom within a Renaissance dining-hall, staircases that led nowhere, a clump of bushes planted against a backcloth. We passed across the terrace and through the hall of a French *château*. Beyond this was a Kaffir hut opposite the cells of a Moorish prison; then came the whole ground floor of a Viennese villa, three bedrooms of the same plucked from aloft and laid alongside, then a modern art bathing-pool. All were lying dark and deserted. Dimly seen back-grounds like veritable *elle-maidens* showed reality only on one side, the other being a lattice of lath, plaster, and sloping struts. Through this oddly tenanted gloom a fitful spasm of music lured us forward as though we were Peer Gynts penetrating into some trolls' troglodytic kingdom.

As we drew nearer voices mingled with the music. The words were unintelligible until during a pause of melody we heard a series of strange commands.

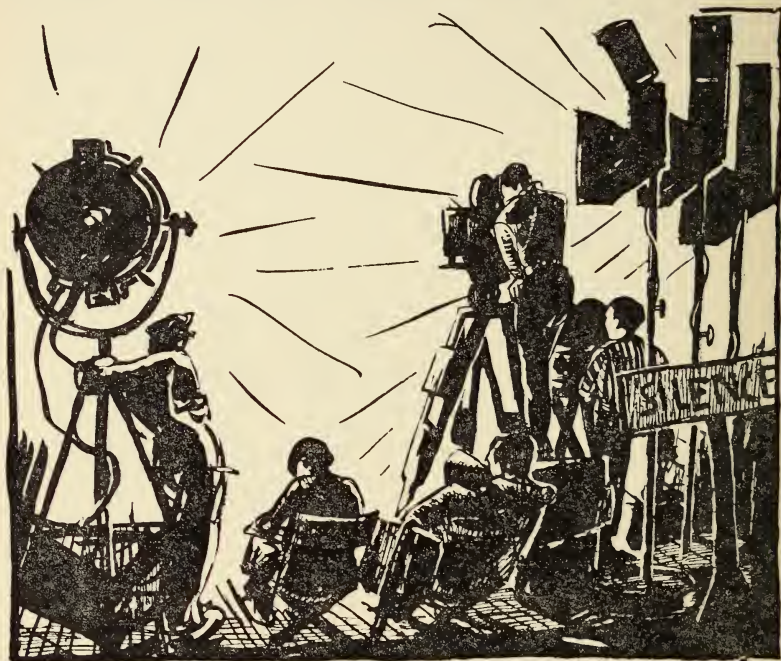
"Take your oil off over there. Pull your nine down harder. Silk that back wall a li'l' bit and kill that baby."

Round a long curtain of backcloth we came on to the set. We saw a row of tall, grotesque-looking instruments. At their feet clustered black figures silhouetted, paper-like, against a vivid cavern of brilliance scooped from the darkness by the powerful lights. Suspended from the invisible roof overhead were grids of mercury lights floating like immense square moons of powerful green cheese; to right and left on tall tripods arc-lamps glared like tropic suns, and along the top of the scenery a line of tall-hatted 'scoops' added a more diffused radiance. The cameras, like small machine-guns, were perched high on massive legs, and the cameramen, self-respecting technicians forced into a certain dandyism by contact with the business, stood on piles of boxes to reach the level of their instruments. Electricians and scene-shifters

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

wearing striped overalls, like overgrown children in rompers, lounged with an air of loose carelessness mixed with good-humoured contempt that is the American workman's normal poise.

Among the camera-legs and tripod-stands crouched a line of square canvas chairs. Each had a name painted on the



LIGHTS AND CAMERAS

back. Each chair was sacred to one behind and to no other. Would you learn the importance of any person on the set? See if he has a chair. If not, you may almost with safety disdain him. Except the camera-men. Theirs is no sitting job, but they are by no means unimportant. In fact, Isaacs remarked with his customary acid intent: "If I meet a star on the lot and she asks me what I am, I say I'm a second camera-man. It is the only way to get civil behaviour from

## *Hollywood—First Days on the Movie Lot*

her. You see, a second camera-man may one day be a director, but a bloody author never will be anything more than a bloody author."

The scene that we perceived between the silhouettes of lights, cameras, operators, and workmen was that of a low-class, dockside drinking-den, the sublimation of a hundred romantic bars. It had a poop with a ship's steering-wheel, behind which was a pool-table. Bar was divided from saloon by the jutting ship's figurehead of a half-nude woman. For a movie set it was very complete, since almost every corner was to be used as the background of some scene or other.

The chairs marked "Betty Compson" and "Geo. Bancroft" were empty, since the two, she in the bedraggled finery of a dockside tart (all too beautiful for her job, with something of innocence shining through the degradation), he as the egoistic stoker (cutting the edge of his rude indifference by a suggestion of incongruous good nature), were taking their positions under the distilled glare of a few thousand candle-power. Green and purple illumination from the mercury moons above, and yellow from the sun-arcs, mottled their faces with contrasting and death-like tints, while the director issued his instructions and the chief camera-man stared at them through a tinted square of glass to estimate their exact photographic values.

To the left an additional battery of lights played on a group of toughs beyond the camera's range. The director, a thickset young man with wild hair and a rough tweed coat, addressed them:

"Now then, you boys, when I say go, put some pep into it. Don't just push one another about as if you were a bunch of babies."

He sat back in the chair marked "Mr Von Sternberg" and placed a small megaphone to his lips.

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

"Now try it over. Ready?"

"Music!"

From the darkness behind the big sun-arcs a violin wailed and a harmonium grunted like a passionate duet between a musical hyena and a melodious wart-hog. The director



MEASURING OFF: REHEARSING THE FIGHT

allowed a few moments for this stimulus to work on the feelings of his actors, then through the megaphone bellowed :  
"Go!"

The actors sprang into motion. But Von Sternberg was not satisfied. He bellowed "Stop!" through the megaphone, and, turning the instrument toward the musicians, shouted :

"That tune's no good. Stir us up a bit. Put more battle spirit into it. Gee, nobody feels like fighting to a damned waltz!"

## *Hollywood—First Days on the Movie Lot*

He jumped from his seat and, pushing Bancroft aside, gesticulated in his place.

“Like this, George, see!”

“Well, now, I thought that it would be more natural if I . . .” the burly sailor began.

“That is all right perhaps, George, but I can see how the whole thing works together, see? I’m looking at this thing not just as one piece of individual action, but as a whole. You try it as I say. And, Betty dear, what I want you to do is more like this. I mean keep it quieter. Eh?”

A little grudgingly the highly salaried stars submitted. We did not know, at that time, that we were witnessing a mute struggle between Von Sternberg and his stars. The former, in order to bring out the full intensity of this dockside drama, wished to hold his characters down to harsh realism. He wanted them to seem really degraded. But the stars could not afford to think exclusively of the artistic merits of the final picture. They dared not risk their whole careers in order to make one masterpiece for Director Von Sternberg. The actress had to preserve her famous charm under all circumstances: the public expected it from her. If she deliberately lowered herself too far for the sake of the piece, heaven only knew what might happen to her in the future. The actor had his well-known rough and careless good-fellowship to maintain: his public demanded that from him. So, no matter what the character in the actual cast might be, he had to hold on to this rough good-fellowship to the last. They could not afford to forget that public approval is the last appeal controlling every star’s occupation.

Hence the muted duel. The director wanted to create a masterpiece of unrelenting reality; the stars had to avoid shocking their public. Yet they were conscious that, on the wings of a real masterpiece (that is, a masterpiece measured as masterpieces of the films are measured, by box-office

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

receipts), they, as actors, might mount yet higher in the salary scale. So the stars had to be on the alert, to estimate. To submit themselves wholly to a grand success might prove to be the best of good luck, but, on the other hand, to sacrifice ever so small a section of their public esteem for a poor picture would be mere folly. To be cast for such very sordid characters was trial enough, but to be forbidden to relieve that sordidness by the sweet pathos of a suggested innocence or by rude good nature might mean catastrophe. Here then was the reason of that silent struggle which caused us to divine a sense of tension between the director and his stars.

Nor did we know that Von Sternberg was himself treading on his own heels. The imitating monkey spirit that makes modern business pounce upon any success and by a flood of imitations inundate the market, thus robbing the inventor of a proper proportion of his legitimate reward, is intensified a hundred times in the film world. Few studios have the courage to try out new ideas or techniques, but should any experimenter have a hint of success the others fling themselves on to the trail. Every studio at once copies both manner and matter, a dozen variants of the film that has hit the public eye are at once rushed into the theatres hoping to participate in the profits of success. So, almost before the originator has had time to repeat his lucky hit, the public has become nauseated by the continual imitation.

Von Sternberg had made one such hit with his film *Underworld*. At once a dozen underworld films leapt upon his back, and he himself was now trying a second film with an underworld flavour. Unluckily the moment had passed, and among the host of imitations *The Docks*, in spite of its often remarkable pictorial qualities, failed to repeat the initial success.

Not only does success inspire imitations, failure creates

## *Hollywood—First Days on the Movie Lot*

taboos. Some one suggested that Feuchtwanger's remarkable novel, *Jew Süss*, was excellent material for a moving picture. But he was answered :

"We deny your premise. Jewish pictures are off. Look at the failure of *Abie's Irish Rose*."

. . . . .

Von Sternberg turned again to his hobos. "Now, you boys," he said, "the music is better. Don't you forget. Plug each other properly."

With no high reputations to lose, nor special publics to betray, seeing that they were but supers at seven dollars a day, the boys plugged one another with a will, while the violinist, screaming with proper battle spirit, plied his bow more and more ferociously, until we wondered that the strings did not snap in his face. In the resultant picture the whole of this lusty fight, the most sincere part of the scene, came out as no more than a dimly seen and confused movement reflected in a fly-blown mirror behind the heads of the two principals.

The director turned back to his seat.

"Music !" bellowed the megaphone.

Of course, he was well aware of the stars' reservations. With narrowed eyes, he estimated that he had pushed them down as low as they would permit.

"That's good," he said. "Cameras."

As the operators turned the handles the cameras gave out a thin whirring sound, vying with the sizzle of the big arc-lamps. The stars sprang again into action, the boys plugged one another heartily, the violin wailed, and the harmonium grunted like a missionary meeting gone mad. The whole action did not take a minute.

"Cut !" shouted the director.

"N.G.," he said.

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

A spick young man stood forward between the actors and cameras with a blackboard in his hand. N.G. in white letters was inscribed on it. The cameras whirled half a turn.

"You didn't get that quite right, Betty. Give it less action. Very quiet, see. What I mean is . . ."

The scene was shot again and again, half a dozen times before the autocrat was satisfied.

"That'll do. Wrap it up," he grunted.

"Did you hear him, 'wrap it up'?" said Ornitz to us. "I have a theory about the phrase. That is the way all directors express their satisfaction at a piece of work. I maintain that it comes from the cloak-and-suit business which has provided us with so many of our first and most successful promoters."

While the cameras were being moved in for a 'close-up' the director stretched himself and greeted Ornitz.

Betty Compson and Bancroft came out of the glare, their places being taken by two other actors, dressed as they were and resembling them superficially. These were the doubles.

The assistant camera-man extended a tape-measure from the lens to their noses. The focus was adjusted.

. . . . .

Von Sternberg was one of the younger, more advanced directors. He had ambitions. Not content merely to tell stories, sequently pictured in appropriate situations, he strove to make them also works of calculated art. In other words, he had ideals. He also wished to raise the tone of the movies. His hair indicated this. It was a carefully unkempt Whistlerian shock, though lacking the famous white lock. But a successful director is not able to be too consistently artistic, and the whole of his person indicated, by stages, a certain blend of interests in his make-up. If the hair was artistic the face was keenly business and practical; his rough tweed Norfolk jacket was sportive; his fat walking-cane betokened a dash

## *Hollywood—First Days on the Movie Lot*

of the country squire ; his full-bottomed, well-creased flannel trousers, white with a narrow blue line, hinted at the fashionable beach club ; while his shoes, white buckskin with black decorations, lent a touch of lawless fantasy. However, on Mr Ornitz's introduction, he greeted us almost as though we were equals, which, we may add, from a man earning his two thousand dollars a week, to a pair of stony-broke painter-authors sneaking into Hollywood without heralding trumpets or headlines, was really a tribute to the democracy in his character.

And here we should insist that Kings, Cabinet Ministers, and Importances of Hollywood are unable to be all things to all men. Their greetings, which may be divided into four categories, are bound to be carefully calculated. First, of course, comes their intimate friends. Then, with the exception of Kings, they have those to whom they must be cordial from motives of personal interest ; then those to whom they must be polite from motives of general interest. Beyond these stands the rest of the world, which must be held at arm's-length. For Hollywood, that repudiates neither the Flesh nor the Devil, is afraid of the World. The World, like a tame tiger, must be amused, placated, pandered to, but it must be kept off. For in a trice the World would open its mouth and swallow Hollywood entire.

The World cannot be convinced that, given a chance, thousands of its members are not just as capable of earning a thousand pounds a week as those that actually do. Luck has plucked out a few stars, comets, planets, but who knows what the Milky Way might not contain if only it could be disentangled? In the World's eyes the task is too easy for the rewards. So, in order to defend itself, Hollywood has to be suspicious of and unfriendly to uninvited intrusion.

Any prominent Hollywood character is like a man clinging to a cliff. From every side envious or pleading hands are stretched out toward him. The first would thrust him down

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

from his eminence, the others are craving assistance upward toward the starry heights. In normal walks of life the higher a man climbs the safer he becomes, but in Hollywood, as in South American republics, brevet rank is won only at the risk of continual disaster. In fact, Von Sternberg himself told us



THE MIDDLE-DISTANCE SHOT

that he was the only director in Hollywood that had survived two consecutive 'flops' without losing his reputation.

Now he turned from us. The cameras were once more in position. The doubles had been centred on the focusing screen; the measure on the tape had been noted; the stars had mopped their faces with small pieces of blotting-paper, had revived their complexions, somewhat battered by the heat of the lamps, had risen from their chairs, and had replaced their doubles; the boys had clenched their fists ready

## *Hollywood—First Days on the Movie Lot*

to batter one another with seven dollars' worth of good-will. Von Sternberg picked up the megaphone.

"Music !"

Jo found herself standing near Betty Compson's double. An interchanged smile opened easy conversation. Supers, or 'extras,' as they are called, and doubles need not fear the World ; they live in the Bohemian democracy of Chance : a few pounds can engender no such suspicion of motive as can many hundreds a week.

"Have you two talked with Miss Compson?" she asked my wife. "She's a dandy to work for, I tell you. As kind as could be. When I heard I was to work for her I just jumped for joy. Not like some of these stars, she isn't. Why, some of them are terrors. They seem to want to cut a girl's heart out for fun.

"Mind you, I'm not so badly fixed myself. Of course, being a double you don't get much chance to act, but if you look at things straight, how many of us extras has ever a chance to get to be a star? Mighty few, believe me ! So when I took up this business I said to myself : 'If a girl can't be a star she's going to have a mighty bad time trying to get jobs at seven dollars a day and nothing else.' I studied hairdressing and beauty work. And now I'm on regular employment instead of hanging on to a telephone from the casting bureau hoping for a ring some day."

A few minutes later she was in conversation with a Japanese camera-man, come from Tokio to study the art of Von Sternberg. He was examining, with the excited awe so characteristic of his race, the contents of Miss Compson's make-up box, and with his handkerchief he measured the exact length of her long false eyelashes.

"Cut !" boomed Von Sternberg.

The electrician's whistle shrilled loudly, and at the signal all the blazing lights, the sun-arcs, the Kleigs and scoops

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

blinked, reddened, and died, leaving only the greenish glare of the mercury moons overhead. That hungry tint was reflected in our faces. It was lunch-time.

"Everybody back on the set at two o'clock," shouted the sub-director, a dashing young man, wearing flannel plus-fours and with fair hair flowing in water waves too beautiful for any of Nature's crimp, confessing plainly the tongs' artificial aid.



BETTY'S FAKE EYELASHES

When we came out from the darkness of the stage into the Californian sunlight the lot was no longer deserted. Huge stages were emptying their populations: actors, directors and assistants, script-clerks, electricians, supers, and scene-shifters in a flood—toward the restaurant. Plus-fours brushed against Red Indian chaps; overalled workmen rubbed elbows with Regency bucks; crinolines and lace pantalettes were contrasted with the Californian girls' prevalent fashion of no stockings and skirts above the knees. A group of workboys who preferred sport to refreshment were playing a game of fives against one of the big stage-doors.

The movie canteen was divided into two sections, marking a brusque division that some social psychologists are predicting as the future permanent severance of American civilization, the self-helpers and the served. In the first division was a long, oval quick-lunch counter set with tall, fixed piano-stools. Here supers and workmen jostled elbows in acute physical and moral discomfort, for it is remarkable that determined concentration on comfort has resulted in destroying comfort at the moments when it is most valuable, so that the American proletariat dines with less sense of dining than does the impoverished Albanian.

## *Hollywood—First Days on the Movie Lot*

The strange medley of costume was here even more marked than in the open. In another part of the room, divided from the first by a partition of curtain, the bigwigs of the studios lunched more at leisure, and, considering the salaries, lunch was cheap. Exquisite girls, uniformed as



THE QUICK-LUNCH COUNTER

waitresses, attended to our wants. Poor creatures! Like peris, they lingered at the gates of paradise. Large eyes ogled, ruby lips pouted, golden hair twined adorably, exquisite dimples charmed. Directors, aye, even supervisors, received their roast lamb or fried liver from lovely fingers. Yet, with the tempting doors of the stages just across the alley-way, they are doomed to languish. The waitresses' uniform was the seal of their failure.

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

As in Montenegro, where marvellous women seem to breed naturally, here in Hollywood beauty is a drug in the market. Not bred here, it has been absorbed from every film-struck village in the States, where not only personal vanity, but local vanity too, urged any extra pretty face-and-legs to try her fortune on the films. Beside these waitresses the feminine stars often faded almost into insignificance. Beauty here was like a nail: a little more or less of sharpness at the point made little difference when it was well driven. Of what use is a sharp nail lacking the hammer? And the hammer is personality.

Ordinarily we think of Hollywood in terms of the female. We judge by the posters, by film propaganda, by scandal, or by memories of the films. The film world seems to be dominated by women stars. Yet, with the exception of a lumber camp, it is possibly the most male place in America. No feminine paradise this, but the hades of lovely women. Here, if nowhere else, they are told bluntly the exact market-value of their looks. And no matter how arrogantly they may hold themselves, no matter how much they presume on their talent or their beauty, there are few feminine feminists here. Hollywood is a business harem, and Chance the Grand Pasha turns easily from one to another concubine.

We returned to the studio on the following day. Once more we presented ourselves before that sleeked young watch-dog, who scowled at us with his habitual unspoken thought:

"Now then, don't you try to get past me! I know all your tricks."

"Mr Von Sternberg," I said.

"Who d'jer want?"

"Mr Von Sternberg."

No response lightened his repudiating face, but as he picked up the telephone he seemed to be a transatlantic Robot,

## *Hollywood—First Days on the Movie Lot*

stirred to action only by telephonic vibrations. However, his expression lightened. We hadn't tricked him that time.

"Mr Von Sternberg's on stage," he said.

"I know," I answered, "but he left word that we were to come out to him there."

"Tell that to the Horse Marines," said his face. "That is an old one." But his voice only answered mechanically :

"Got no 'thority t'pass you through t'Mist Von Sternberg on th'set."

"But Mr Von Sternberg said he would leave word."

"Mr Von Sternberg got no 'thority have you passed through t'him on t'set."

"But do you mean to say——" I was beginning.

"Got no 'thority," he repeated. His face was still fixed in its expression, but the gleam had intensified ; he was up to our game, yes, he was.

"Well, then," said Jo, "ask for Mr Ornitz."

Once more the telephone stirred him to action. Gloomily he made out the pink slips, but as he handed them to us he added threateningly :

"That don't give you 'thority to go on t'sets, mind."

An apprentice watch-dog escorted us to the Stenographic Department and along the corridor. Behind the door we could hear the typewriters chattering as the hired authors were tearing romance to pieces. Romance past, present, and future. Here they were treating the world's masterpieces like newly plucked grapes, tossing them on to the pressing floor, squeezing out their juices, redistilling them, flavouring them anew, making the fine wines of past genius into a movie cocktail.

Oh for one new movie plot ! . . . Oh to think of something that nobody has thought of before ! Oh to be able to make one of the twenty-three possible dramatic situations look like a twenty-fourth ! But reflect, only twenty-three dramatic

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

situations possible out of the whole working of the human heart! Beyond these everything but mere change of circumstances or of combination. Forty authors at sixty pounds a week each; two thousand four hundred weekly pounds' worth of authorship! Truly one might here feel that the mountain was in labour to bring forth . . . a movie plot!

Ornitz's bland smile greeted us over a newspaper. He at least had made his movie plot. He at least could sit content in his little cubicle and let the sixty pounds a week roll up. No longer his the mental torture. Other hands had taken his plot from him. It was being anatomized into continuity.

He had typed it out on a few sheets of paper, half a dozen, no more. He had described only the main skeleton of the plot and delineated the chief characters with sufficiently distinct personalities. Still, those few sheets represented some £500 worth of weekly authorship. Now continuity had it, and £100 a week was mincing it into scenes. Mincing it? No, stuffing it with scenes. Ornitz's sketch was as the iron skeleton that the sculptor sets up for his figure. Continuity was now clapping on the clay. Directors and cameras would shape it. The cutting-room would put on the finish. The Technical Department would make a hundred thousand replicas. The lights of a thousand cinema theatres in a thousand cities would proclaim its name; posters would depict its stars; and somewhere, flashing for a moment on the screen, would appear: "Story by Samuel Ornitz."

Samuel Ornitz, like ourselves, was a newcomer to Los Angeles. He was an importation. His values were not those of Hollywood. Coming from New York, he was a cosmopolitan, for New York is in many ways, and especially in artistic matters, the most cosmopolitan of all the world's big cities. And Ornitz had seen New York from bottom to top. Born in the exotic, strangely blended American Ghetto, he had at last experienced success enough to become the

## *Hollywood—First Days on the Movie Lot*

quarry of the New York lion-hunter. He had fought his first novel on to paper when wearied after hours spent in earning his family's food and lodging; half a page a night perhaps during periods wrenched by sheer will-power from the insidious preoccupations of a job. Yet struggle had not embittered him, nor had success inflated his self-esteem. As an American he had naturally some respect for money as an abstract thing. A bank balance is the sincerest form of art criticism. In the circumstances, that would have been almost impossible to avoid. Money represented things that he had never had before, comforts unknown, ease for his plucky wife, experimental schooling for his children. Nevertheless the mere magic of high salaries never seemed to overawe him. . . .

"It's all very well for you half-baked artists and writers to sneer at the fellows who are earning the big money," we once heard Von Sternberg fling at him. "You do that because you never had any. But I tell you that the man who is earning his two thousand dollars a week is proving all the time that he is worth it."

Ornitz had a fellow-feeling for us. He willingly escorted us out to the stage, in spite of the formal prohibition printed on the pink ticket.

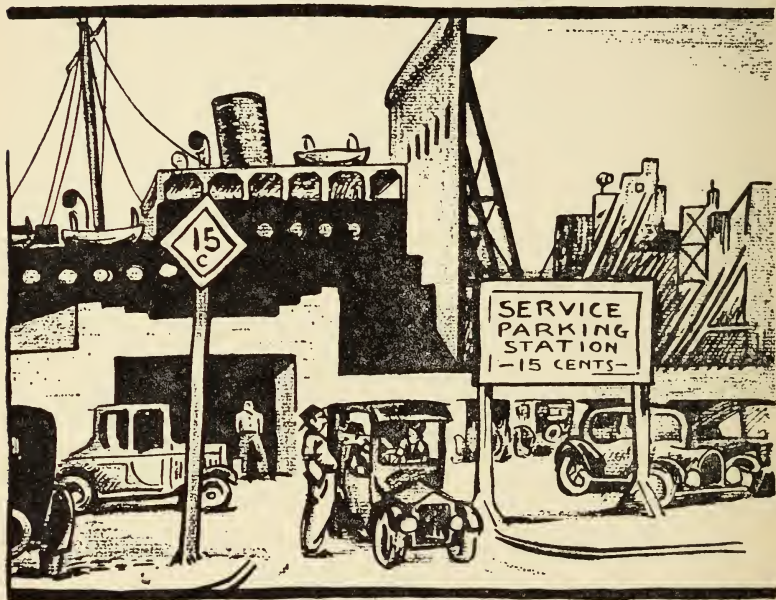
"There's a story about Clara Bow," he said, as we went down the corridor past those ranked names of cubicled literature. "She was arguing here with her director about a situation, and he raised his voice. 'For heaven's sake, don't speak so loud!' she cried. 'You'll wake all the authors.'"

"Next week," he went on, as we left his office, "Von Sternberg will be working on the big set that they've built for him by the steamship. Have you seen it?"

He guided us to the more distant corner of the big movie lot where the half of the steamship towered over the bungalow roofs, a Hollywood landmark. Behind it on a tall lattice

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

framework a gigantic sky backcloth stood higher yet, shutting out the distant vistas of hotels, furniture-stores, and the Hollywood hills, with their clustering palaces of the Movie Great. This steamship was a permanent source of income, since it might be hired by any film company that needed a



THE LASKY PARAMOUNT STEAMSHIP FROM THE STREET

full-sized liner. It was also a storehouse. Now it had been incorporated into a dockside setting, in which grim, rotting vestiges of wharfside shacks encumbered a land not yet solid enough or valuable enough to ensure their being demolished. Sagging, balconied rabbit-warrens of lodging-houses defied gravity on rotting piles. Two full-sized streets had been built along stagnant canals filled with muddy water deep enough to float a rowing-boat. Wires over the street had been stretched from roof to roof, and light tarpaulins shrouded overhead and all the sides. No need here to wait for time or

## *Hollywood—First Days on the Movie Lot*

weather. On the morrow we found this scene in use, a block of night, of fog, and of drizzle sliced from the Californian daylight.

"Three weeks ago," said Ornitz, "this was Venice, and gondolas were plying up and down these canals."

In this immense, hollow-backed construction some rooms were completed, but usually the interiors were elsewhere. That door on the far wharf should have led to the saloon, but in truth it opened into nothing. The interior which they had photographed yesterday was a quarter of a mile away.

We seemed to be in a strange world where the mathematician's paradoxes of space and time had become almost true, and where fourth dimensions were a commonplace. Here was the outside, but the inside was outside of it and elsewhere. Here was the dock, but in the stage barn we found a piece of it in replica, with to-morrow's fog already dense about us. Time was reversed also. Yesterday we witnessed Betty Compson celebrating her rescue from drowning with the brawny George, but only now had she just tried to commit suicide itself as we arrived on the set.

Ornitz passed us on to Von Sternberg and returned to the Stenographic Department. The director in greeting waved a hand at the fog that closed us in.

"Know what that is?" he said. "Nujol. That's it, medical paraffin. Best stuff there is for fogs. Hangs in the air and doesn't smell. Good for us, too; we're a constipated lot anyway."

The pictorial effect was magnificent. The artificial fog hung like an opal under the glow of the Kleig lights and the green mercury lamps. Through the slowly drifting vapour the tall moons of arc-lamps drove long columns of brilliance, cutting one another, blinding, striking wide pools of illumination on to the dripping dock, the slime-smeared piles, the actors and scene-shifters who moved in and out of the opaque

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

air. And against the glittering yet ghostly radiance were silhouetted the camera-men with their grotesque implements; the floor-lights seemed like tall-hatted freaks; the overalled workmen, lax from being steeped in so many warm Californian midsummers, were lounging with an almost Mediterranean grace—soiled pierrots. The Russian violinist was striking out his music with the doubly dramatized gestures of musician and cinema actor, which contrasted oddly with the earnest, foot-labouring, and frog-like appearance of his partner at the harmonium.

Few scenes that we remember have a beauty weirder than those fog effects due to Von Sternberg and the vaporized purgative. One might well parody FitzGerald and exclaim:

I wonder what it is the movies take  
One half as lovely as the scenes they make.

“Spray it a bit over there,” cried Von Sternberg. “It’s getting thin.”

With the compressed-air spray, big brother to that dainty scent implement of the feminine dressing-table, a workman carefully painted the air thicker in the desired spot. Across the floor hissing compressed-air tubes coiled among the electric-light ‘spaghetti,’ and from outside the *thud! thud!* of a petrol air-pump beat a solid, monotonous counter-rhythm to the music of the harmonium and violin.

Another workman was spraying Betty Compson with the purgative, which dripped from her. It appeared as wet as water, but had not the water’s clammy coldness, and in addition was a shield from the chill of the actual water which later was poured in bucketfuls over her. To Bancroft’s waist the other men were strapping a small seat. Hollywood heroines are not as fairy-like as imagination would picture them, nor Hollywood heroes as muscular. The golden-haired double, dripping like her star, was being used to adjust the

## *Hollywood—First Days on the Movie Lot*

support, since eight stone of relaxed womanhood, wholly dependent on the arms alone, might be a serious inconvenience to concentrated acting. Besides, it is confoundedly difficult to arrange an unconscious girl well in real life—she sags too much.

Betty Compson now took the double's place, and her Nujol-soaked skirt was carefully arranged to hide the seat. Then she was draped in a becoming faint. A workman gave the two a final spraying with Nujol, and, while the violinist struck up appropriate music, buckets of water were dashed over their heads. At each bucketful Bancroft grimaced and blew the spray from his face.

“Cameras.”

Slowly, heavily, the soaked and grumpy star stalked away, bearing his fair, dripping burden through the arc-lights into the darkness.

. . . . .

“What,” cried Von Sternberg, when he heard of our difficulties at the gate, “they wouldn’t let you through? But I gave my secretary orders . . .”

“The boy said there was no authority,” we repeated.

“No authority,” he growled. “I’ll soon see to that. Call up my secretary to-morrow before you come.”

But his autocracy was, it seemed, limited. For the clear voice of his secretary told us that we must first see Mr Dick, of the Publicity Department.

Hitherto we had been admitted by the door to the right of young Cerberus, the door which always celebrated our passage by a noise like that of a gigantic cockchafer. This time we were shown through the left-hand door, a silent, secretive opening that led into dark passages dimly lit by office doors. Passing a wicket-gate, we came into a small hall surrounded alternately by doors and by baize-covered

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

notice-boards to which strips of newspaper were fixed with drawing-pins. Here were displayed all yesterday's news about the movie world, gathered from all the newspapers of the United States. Scandals great or small, divorces, engagements, law-suits, indiscretions, confessions . . . here the publicity doctor kept his finger on the pulse of the public. One was a clipping in verse recording a quarrel between Adolphe Menjou and a firm of shirt-makers :

Adolphe Menjou's so gay to-day ;  
Now, what d'yer think of that ?  
Because in all Los Angeles  
There's no Menjou cravat.  
Max Goldman and George Wenzel  
Can't manufacture ties  
And sell them as Menjou cravats  
Of various hues and size.  
Judge Edwin Hahn's so ordered  
No man shall now bedeck  
His lowly Adam's apple  
In ape of Menjou's neck. . . . [etc.]

Here was the department that watched over the effect of the stars' behaviour, the result of their divorces or immoralities on the box-office receipts, for apart from receipts nothing really matters. Here indeed was the force that kept the stars suspended in the firmament, or which, with one blow of that secret bludgeon called the Black List, could swipe them from the heyday of their brilliance into bitter obscurity.

Here was the real autocrat of the film business. Stars and directors might well boast of their huge incomes, might parade in the limelight and reap the headlines, but without this quiet corner of the Mexican palace there would be few headlines and little limelight. They were only puppets after all ; here were the puppet-masters. Von Sternberg might well give us permission to make drawings on his sets, but here Mr Dick, with a twentieth part perhaps of Von

## *Hollywood—First Days on the Movie Lot*

Sternberg's salary, was the man who gave him permission to give us permission. The rudder is less remarkable than the figurehead.

Mr Dick was little more than a youth, smoothly haired, neatly dressed ; not the person whom you might well imagine with a metaphorical trumpet under his arm, a trumpet that could resound the full width and length of the United States. He listened to our demand with the official, easy good-humour, with that readiness to consider a question fairly, that makes the American business man so pleasant to deal with in contrast with the business men of so many other nations, including our own. And this easiness was not bred by any sympathy with our desire.

At last he decided it was too serious a matter for a single decision. He called in a superior publicity man, one a little less spick-and-span, who heard us through and then called in a yet higher panjandrum, still less carefully clad. For, in parenthesis, we noticed often that the higher one climbed in the scale of Hollywood the less meticulous the costume had to be. Von Sternberg took more sartorial liberties than the camera-men, and they than the sub-director.

One day, as I was watching D. W. Griffiths directing, a voice sounded in my ear :

“ D’you know who that is over there ? ”

“ Who ? ” I said.

“ That man over there. I’ll tell you ; it’s D. W. You know, D. W. Griffiths,” said the young man, a studio messenger called in movie slang the ‘ grip.’

“ I know,” I answered.

“ But, hell ! ” he said. “ Can’t you see he’s wearing an old coat ? ”

“ Well, why shouldn’t he ? ”

“ But, gosh, man ! It’s D. W., I’m telling you. He don’t have to wear old coats.”

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

"No," I said, "but the point is that he can if he likes. You daren't."

"Clothes tell," as the advertisements say: and, in fact, no one does dare to dress negligently here unless of the highest rank. Where should this fact be known if not in the Publicity Department, which makes an almost scientific study of what does tell?

The problem that brought almost the highest of the Publicity Department hurrying from his office was our request to have permission to loiter behind the scenes on the stages and sketch there. It was apparently the first time such a demand had been made. The objection was not against our wish to sketch in the abstract, but against our wish to draw the scenery as well as the stars.

"We can let you in and you can draw the stars and people, but you mustn't draw the sets," said the bigwig, chewing his cigar at us.

"But the sets are the very things we want to draw," we exclaimed. "We want to get the strange mixture of the real and the false. We are proposing to make a set of etchings of the work in the studios, and, of course, the half-made sets, the struts and stays and the general gimcrack, are tremendously interesting."

"No," said the chief publicity man decidedly. "We just can't let you do that. It will have so bad an effect on the public. And, gee! the films are going down badly enough as it is. The public like to think that the scenes are real. . . ."

"But look here," we remonstrated. "They know already that the actors are imitations. If they see Jannings one month as a Russian general and the next month as a street-corner grocer they know he is a fake. What difference can it make?"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Oddly enough the Australian bushmen take the movies as dead reality, and follow with passionate sympathy from one film to another the extraordinary ups and downs of well-known movie actors. "Poor fellow," they say, "he's lost all his money again. What bad luck these people do have!"

## *Hollywood—First Days on the Movie Lot*

"It does," asserted the chief publicist. "It does, and I'm telling you. The public wants to think it's real."

"But, good Lord! our stuff will never reach the cinema public," we protested. "We are going to make etchings. Thirty or forty proofs to each plate. They will be exhibited in picture-galleries and such places. Bought by collectors . . ."

"That makes no difference," said the chief publicist. He gloomed at us over his cigar; his thick neck seemed to swell in the effort to find a way out. I suppose that the backing of Von Sternberg was too weighty to permit him to throw us forthwith into the street.

"Now see here," he said at last, "if we give you permission to draw, will you promise not to draw the backs of the sets?"

"But what is the use?" we remonstrated. "We might give you the promise, but we could go off and draw them from memory afterward. And look here. The M.G.M. and the United Artists have given us permission to draw on their lots, and they haven't said a thing about not drawing the backs of the sets. And, of course, we shall mention the lot on which the drawings were made. . . ."

Even then we had the utmost difficulty in persuading him that our sketches would not send the public flocking away in disgust from the cinemas. Poor Publicity Department! It was already in a predicament; the public had recently shown a decrease of interest in the pictures. Warners' had just brought out their first movietone production, and now we were threatening to give the legitimate pictures their knock-down blow. Or, at least, he treated the subject as seriously as though we were. But the thought that we might give artistic publicity to the M.G.M. and to the United Artists and withhold it from the Paramount disturbed his sense of professional rivalry. He was in a cleft stick. Be the consequences what they might, he could not afford to loiter behind his rivals. So at last he said:

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

"Now, look here, folks, I'm going to give you permission to go and draw as much as you like, and don't forget to mention us along with the others. But please don't draw any more of the backs of the sets than you can help. I'm being a white man to you ; act like a white man to us."

A month later another publicity director procured us a paper from the Central Reference Bureau, a general passport to the studios, guaranteeing both our efficiency and our inoffensiveness.



THE DROWNED

## *Chapter VI*

### HOLLYWOOD—THE DIRECTOR

FROM that moment we began to occupy a curious position in Hollywood. We were neither in it nor outside, privileged lookers-on at a spectacle that admitted few disinterested spectators. There were the 'peeps,' of course. These were visitors, hastily toured through the movie studios by our wary friends of the Publicity Department, groups of one or two, friends of magnates, supervisors, or directors; or there were the larger associations, often distinguished by big buttons or by little banners in their buttonholes, which advertised to the curious that they were members of some collective and often rather aggressive social group. For America, in terror of individualism and of social solitude, rushes into the protection of collectivity; almost anything can be made an excuse for a club, the United Sunday-school Teachers of San Antonio County, or the Federated Company of Buttonhole-stampers, or the Association of Watch-wheel Tooth-cutters, Inc., not to mention power-wielding groups such as the Rotarians, Elks, Lions, and other zoological manifestations of the clotting impulse. Persons who desire to get on in the States are advised by the vocational bureaux to join at least five different kinds of clubs. The value of this gregariousness was shown vividly in a difference of manner. The favoured visitors who came introduced by high influence would creep in bashfully, as if loath to intrude; they tended to lurk in corners, to spy discreetly between the cameras and floor-lights; but the members of an Associated Corporation knew only too well the weight of their presence: they stood there

## Star-dust in Hollywood

not as individuals but as representatives, not only as men but as button-bearers, and, while satisfying a purely human curiosity, were conferring a not wholly despicable honour. If Chambers of Commerce hastened to provide cars for their use, how could Publicity Departments deny them? Or there



BUTTON-BEARERS

were wandering newspaper people, representing small papers in unknown towns, the *Smithville Eagle* or the *Heinzburg Clarion*, papers which, as likely as not, boasted no more than an editor in shirt-sleeves, who did his own typesetting and printing, and in his spare time sold his own paper over the counter. Such correspondents were often wandering matrons who had married off their children and now wrote glib travel letters

full of superlatives to the home-town paper. Nevertheless they had to be enthusiastically received by Mr Dick and introduced to the stars, who at once put on their reception-of-wandering-publicity manner; to snap it off again as soon as the lady's back was turned.

"Now," we heard one saying to a star, "I can tell you that Smithville is profoundly desirous of hearing you on the subject of your next film. What can I tell them on the subject?"

"I can't say a thing," he answered. "You see, when I am working on a film I make a rule never to think of the next. You see, I have to sink my personality entirely in the one I'm acting at present. I've got to psychologize my character completely, get under his skin, if you understand me.

## *Hollywood—The Director*

In fact, I must live him all the time. Now, naturally, you can understand that the character I am making at the present moment can't have anything on the next one I'll have to do. . . ."

"Such single-minded devotion to your part!" ejaculated the lady in admiration. "Now, sir, I suppose that's what



THE LADY AND THE STAR

gives you the intensity that has earned you such a number of admirers. . . ."

She hurriedly scribbled down her own phrases in her notebook.

But we, lunching only the day before with the star and his director, had heard the former say:

"Now, look here, Joe, what's my next part going to be?"

"Well, George," replied Von Sternberg, "you know I'm

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

doing Sam's story next, and they want me to use Eugene. I'll tell you straight I'd rather have you. His back view isn't half as expressive as yours, and he can't walk friendly as you do. . . ."

"Yes, I know," answered the star. "But I've just bought a house, and I got to keep on paying for it. And here we are within a fortnight of finishing up this darned story and no new one in sight yet. I tell you, Joe, I'm getting worried. I just don't hear of anybody who's got a part that will suit me. . . ."

Undoubtedly we came in on a different footing. The Publicity Department soon ceased to shepherd us. "Well, I guess you know your way out," Mr Dick would say cheerily. The stars soon stopped putting on their publicity manners. We were able to draw our sketches at ease and to watch the slow development of Von Sternberg's play, *The Docks of New York*. Day after day we studied the director hammering the thing into shape.

Von Sternberg, as we have said, was one of the younger men. He belonged to some half a dozen in Hollywood who, before the devastating intrusion of the talkies, were getting a grip on the problems of the moving picture and were struggling to shape it into a definite artistic means of expression. The complexities of the problem are probably unsuspected by the public.

A film is a series of pictures that tells a story, as a book is a series of paragraphs with a similar intent. Most people, like most readers, are content to watch a film, or read a book, for its story alone. Unconsciously they may admire the compositions or settings, but they will waste little thought on them. The better the film is the less they may think of the presentation; if really good it should seem to grow quite naturally from the story. Their curiosity is not roused by the problem of how that excellency of presentation is

## *Hollywood—The Director*

reached. And yet one little question will show quite unsuspected problems in the making of a good cinematograph film.

How is it that one can watch a seven-reel film, full of rapid, often contradictory action, packed with varied aspects and changes of lighting, moving from small figures to close-up heads, and yet feel no optical fatigue? The fact is that every picture has to be carefully planned, not only in itself as part of a story, not only as dramatically expressive composition, not only as beautiful light and shade, or as rhythmically appropriate action, but each little scene has to be planned optically with reference to the pictures that went just before and with those that shall follow immediately after. Each picture in a first-class film can be considered as the words in a poem.

In the case of mere doggerel the words hardly matter, as long as they fit the metre and rhyme at the verse ends, but in genuine poetry each word should grow harmoniously out of its predecessor and should lead inevitably to the next; if not the tongue will trip and stumble and feel uneasy. In a good film the sense of coherent sequence is given by motion and by tone values, instead of by articulation. For instance, if each succeeding set of pictures skipped from rapid movement to quiet or from dark scenes to light, or if the chief interest were concentrated on the right, but appeared on the left in the next, the eyes would soon become fatigued. Pictorial rhythms must seem to sway from scene to scene, must pick up naturally from one to another, and must vary enough to avoid monotony.

Consider three consecutive scenes, A, B, and C. If at the close of A the interest is placed on the right, then scene B, although perhaps quite unconnected in subject-matter with A, must begin with the interest concentrated almost at the point which the eye was watching at the close of A, or it must

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

continue a movement suggested by A. Again, whatever the action may be that runs through B, scene C must pick up the interest at the local spot where B ceases. So that the eye is danced about insensibly, but is never steeplechased. This has no reference to the story itself, but merely to the making of the pictures considered only as spots of colour and centres of pictorial interest. The eye should be led a gentle dance, swaying easily and comfortably from side to side of the picture, now fast, now slow, as the emotional needs of the story demand.

The movement and chiaroscuro in a film picture might be considered as the rhythms and colour in music; the plot and emotional expression might then be compared to the melody and accompaniment. And, as in the orchestra, all this complicated sway of motion and chiaroscuro has to be 'conducted.' Give an orchestral score to a band of musicians and see what a hash they would make of the music; so also, no matter how eminent a set of actors might be, the movies would result in a similar hash without the director. A further obstacle is presented by the fact that once any series of pictures is taken, developed, and printed it is fixed. So that this orchestrated pick-up, sway, and rhythm from scene to scene has to be visualized and concreted in the mind of the director before the camera is turned on to the actors. The director is not like a painter or a writer; he can cut out a scene, but, short of rephotographing the whole, he cannot make any corrections within the scene itself. He cannot scratch out or paint over again. And a director found rephotographing many scenes would not long hold his position; Hollywood has little time for obvious fumbling.

Unluckily the public does not always judge things at their just value.

The advertisements display the relative importances thus :

# *Hollywood—The Director*

BETTY COMPSON

BACLANOVA

AND

GEORGE BANCROFT

IN

THE DOCKS OF NEW YORK

A PARAMOUNT PICTURE

Then in much smaller letters :

*Directed by Joseph Von Sternberg*

The public reading the posters say : “ Oh, there’s Betty Compson [or Clara Bow, or Emil Jannings, or Ronald Colman, or whoever the star may be] ! She [or he]’s always good.” Yet it would be often safer had they noted the smallest name, that of the director—Murnau, Lubitsch, Vidor, or Von Sternberg. But the stars appear in person ; they impress their humanity on the audience ; their salaries are advertised and their divorces recorded in the newspapers. What would the world care if Joseph Von Sternberg were divorced or no ? He has no personality. His image is never seen. He only directs.

In the old Greek theatre actors wore masks that gave them the proper type and expression. These renowned stars—most of them, indeed—are but the masks that the director puts on ; they are marionettes dancing as he pulls the strings. What did it really matter to Von Sternberg whether he had Bancroft or some other as a star for his next picture ? Indeed, he said bluntly to us one day :

“ Actors ? What are you saying about actors ? That,” pointing to the camera, “ is my only actor. These,” waving a hand a little contemptuously over stars, supers, and scenery alike, “ these are my raw material.”

And, sitting there day by day, sketching the varied phases

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

of the scenario's development, we could observe how difficult a business this directing was. To watch Von Sternberg shaping out with living and often reluctant actors, with dead scenery and subtle arrangements of light and shade, the whole dramatic actuality of his story was the revelation of a complexity hitherto unsuspected.

At his side sat the script-girl, an industrious young woman in breeches and a beret. Now and again, as a change, she had to sit on his knee, but that was merely an aloof and complaisant gesture of the purely abstract but general amorousness that rules in these circles. On her knee was a big-typed book. This contained all the small segmentary scenes into which the craft of the continuity man had chopped the original plot. All round in the darkness of the big 'stage' were the sets of scenery to be used in the play, and at the far end we might hear the carpenters hammering on new sets or pulling down old ones. Only the scene immediately in use was glowing under the glare of the arcs and scoops.

The need of using the scenery as it is built often prevents the story from being developed as the author has written it or as a play is rehearsed. It is rather made as a painter paints a picture. Here a piece, there a piece. Sometimes the last scenes may be shot almost at the beginning, the beginning scenes at the end. In *The Docks of New York*, with the big street and the ocean liner as a background, parts were to take place in the daylight, parts at night with the fog effects. Serially most of the daylight scenes came after those at night, but they were shot first before the whole set was enshrouded in its light-excluding tarpaulins. Or, again, Bancroft photographed entering from the outside might have been already photographed entering the inside, which was built on the stage, or, on the other hand, he might not come in for a week yet. An actor may knock an enemy through a door of a hut built on the high deserts of Arizona and the victim may finish

## Hollywood—The Director

his fall in a Hollywood studio, or he may dive from a steamer in New York Harbour and rise dripping from a tank dug in the Paramount lot 3000 miles away. The only person who provides the coherence which binds this diverse action to-



gether is the director. The separate scenes can be thought of as the beads of a necklace and the director as the string that holds them together. When we consider the often inverted and hotchpotch methods of recording the films we can understand more of the difficulties of portraying any kind of subtle or gradual stages of emotional growth. Betty Compson told us of her first star part, *The Miracle Man*. The film depicted the gradual regeneration of a band of swindlers,

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

a process of slow and discreet psychology. Yet this film was taken in the most haphazard way. A long piece in the middle which was left out for several months had to be connected exactly in true emotional relationship with what had gone before and was to come after.

The director is both an emotional dancing-master and a never-ceasing picture-maker. At the side of his cameras Von Sternberg had a small view-finder, through which he could watch the movements of the actors exactly as the camera was recording them. All this time he had to be composing each scene into a complete work of art. Each scene had to satisfy the laws of composition as a picture, but had also to be striking and original at the same time. Then, apart from the mere optical flow already mentioned, he had to shape the movements of his actors into a kind of unconscious rhythmic statement. If George knocked another man down, the camera recorded a certain direction and rhythm of action; the next scene had either to echo the flow, answer it, complement it, or diminish it to stillness. As in a dance, each action necessitated a following concerted reaction of harmonious movement.

In the creation of such concerted movement the actors are nothing but puppets. They can have little idea of the actual pictures they are making—this depends solely on the camera. Therefore the good director controls his cameras, arranges his compositions and movements, and so turns what appears only to be a mere matter of depicting a story into a piece of calculated and deliberate art. How many times did we not watch Von Sternberg's puppets repeat a movement? To them it might seem emotionally correct enough, but to him, as picture-maker, it was still rhythmically imperfect. Such rhythms, when found, however cunningly planned, always had to be hidden in the realism of the scene.

## *Hollywood—The Director*

The work of the conscientious director is by no means finished when he arrives home at night. In the studio he has perhaps shot five or six segments of the scenario, but to do this has used every moment of the time. For the following day's shooting he must now visualize five or six new scenes as far as possible in their entirety. This is a little different from any other kind of artistic creation and merits perhaps an exposition.

The writer can rewrite, correct, and alter between the lines as he goes along. Sterne said that he wrote 'full' and corrected 'empty,' or *vice versa*. The painter can modify his picture as it grows. No such liberty is allowed the director. On the morrow when he arrives at the studio he has to know what he is going to do, what his actors are going to do, and what he wants his camera-man to get out of the picture.

To know this he must study the scenes in all their details of action, emotion, and implication. The dramatic movements are, of course, described by the continuity script, but they are mere words. The actors must be placed by the imagination on the scene. Each shot made on the morrow has thus to be constructively considered down to all its details. The director must consider them as pieces of emotional intensity in relation to the pictures that have gone before and those that must follow after. What emotional pitch must the scene bear in relation to the rest of the film? Monotony or stridency of effect must be avoided, except on rare and deliberate occasions. What quality of background will best fit the emotional intensity of the scene? What must be the movements of the subsidiary actors in relation with the stars? From what angles are the pictures to be taken: is the effect to be quite ordinary or strange, normal or grotesque? What lightings shall be used, harsh or soft, strongly modelled or flat; what emphasis on the figures;

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

what general tint of light or dark? Thus, for every one of the scenes to be shot on the morrow the director has to decide half a dozen serious questions, as well as a number of minor ones, before the work can be properly begun. The six pieces of action must be visualized from at least six different points of view. Nor can they be considered as separate things only, but as coherent parts of the great unfinished mosaic, the final film. The conscientious and artistic director has a hard evening's work after leaving the lot. Small wonder, then, that a director's wife was seeking divorce complaining that her husband only wanted to "stay home and study nights."

. . . . .

In the upper storey of the Technical Department were a dozen small theatres grouped together, and here each morning during the lunch interval the directors, accompanied by script-clerks and perhaps by the stars, came before lunch to review their 'rushes.' These were the actual photographs of the previous day.

We took our places in comfortable chairs. The darkness snapped down.

"Ready?" asked the script-clerk's voice.

"Right," said Von Sternberg.

The image of Betty leapt into light on the distant screen. She was in bed. She turned to the night-table, hunted for a cigarette, and lit it discontentedly; her eyes swung to the left with an inquiring expression; suddenly she was blotted out by a blackboard covered with numbers. As suddenly she reappeared, repeated the actions, was blotted out once more, to reappear and be blotted out six or seven times. That was all. On seeing this actual section of the film, detached from all sequence, we were amazed at the short length of each picture.

"O.K.—two and six," said Von Sternberg.

## *Hollywood—The Director*

"Two and six," answered the script-girl.

To our unpractised eyes there was little to choose among all these different images, but Von Sternberg had selected unerringly those that contained the qualities he needed.

The projector continued its low murmur.

Betty reappeared larger, the middle-distance shot. Once more she lighted the cigarette, swung her eyes obediently; once more Von Sternberg selected without hesitation from some half a dozen. Betty reappeared again, a huge head. Almost every scene was repeated in these three sizes, distant, middle, and close-up. Then George Bancroft came on arguing with Clyde Cook; distance, middle, and close-up; distance, middle, close-up with enormous, grimacing faces, each repeated half a dozen times.



CLYDE COOK

Four or five such scenes represented the whole of the day's work. Four short slips of motion, not one lasting two minutes.

A peculiarity of these rushes was that in them one could distinctly feel the presence of the director. Betty swung her eyes, not because something had startled her naturally, but because somebody outside had shouted at her through the megaphone. So, too, Bancroft and Cook argued and pulled one another about, not from the dictates of an inner desire, but because of an outside will. In these little detached segments one could perceive clearly the texture of the material, just as, in a single cube from a mosaic, one can see the nature of the stone. And, as in the mosaic, in the finished film this sense of the outer material, the impress of

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

the 'direction' is lost. The figures gradually accumulate their own characteristics, and, with the bigger scale and wider movements of the piece, the subtly automatic nature of the action is hidden.

Another fact that they brought home to us was the intense difference between this acting and that of the stage. We do not refer to the spasmodic nature of the continuity, but to the wholly different means of producing illusion. On the stage the voice conveys almost all of the emotional message; gestures emphasize the voice, but subtlety of facial expression is lost by distance, and the eyes are almost invisible to the greater part of the audience. On the stage the actors are human beings reduced to the scale of speaking puppets. On the film the contrary occurs, and gesticulating puppets are enlarged to the size of human beings. The film must make use of almost everything that the stage neglects. Gestures must be very restrained or they seem exaggerated and absurd; especially heroic gestures, which the voice renders dramatic and apparently natural on the stage, at once look ridiculous on the screen. This is shown by any film of fifteen years ago. Small movements, almost imperceptible on the stage, acquire a real value; facial expression carries half of the emotional message, and is supplemented by the use of the eyes—the gestures of the eyes, one might almost say. Oddly enough, where an exaggerated motion of the arm would seem absurd an exaggerated movement of the eyes becomes quite realistic. Thus stage actors do not, of necessity, make the best film stars, and English films that clung to the shibboleth of using the famous names of the stage suffered long from an exaggeration of gesture and a feebleness of expression.

. . . . .

Opposite, as we came from the little theatre, were the cutting-rooms, cubicles hung with strips of film like ribbon

## *Hollywood—The Director*

shops. Here these little minutes of motion and emotion, in reality represented by long ribbons of films, were to be set in sequence and made to form a coherent story. The coarser part of the work was done by highly paid women, the cutters, but the final finish had to be carried out by the director himself. Here he must become an artist in mosaics, with each separate little piece to be fitted in place. There is no rule by which he can work. Exactly how much of the scene to use of distant, how much of middle, how much of close-up ; how much of each would show the emotional quality of the scene at its best advantage ; when should he use a piece of landscape, where introduce pattern ? Such questions can be decided only by the exercise of a peculiar instinct which is the gift of the artist. The director and his assistant, the cutter, were thus artists of motion, weaving these little strips of movement into a consistent whole. They had always to bear in mind firstly the narrative value, secondly the emotional value, thirdly the value of contrast, fourthly ease of vision, and fifthly novelty of conception.

In these small cubicles of cutting-rooms problems such as these are wrapped up in hundreds of festoons of film hanging from hooks or already spun round deep-flanged bobbins. Screwed to the bench was a small electric bioscope into which a piece of film could be slipped ; a button is pressed, and with a whirl the tiny figures, lit from below, sprang into action. By the side of this was a sheet of illuminated glass over which the strips could be stretched and cut at the exact spot necessary. The separate strips were then fastened together by small clips.

Each small strip of scene could be compared to a written paragraph, so the task became as though the director had been presented with a box filled with a thousand detached paragraphs and told to arrange them as a completed book. He would have two or three variants of each paragraph, he must decide which one was the most suitable, and, finally, the

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

book had to be an exact length. A director ordered to make a seven-reel film could not offer a six- or eight-reeler. Often when the film has passed through the cutter's and the director's hands it is still too long. The good continuity-man ought to devise his scenes so that the finished film is an exact length,

but during the production other scenes may be inserted, or sometimes, in an uncanny way, as may happen to all artistic creation, the very work seems to take charge and run off with the makers.

In spite of a business-like surface, a very strange kind of incompetence is tolerated in Hollywood. The art is in many ways a ring, and once inside a man is fairly secure. The outsider must be twice as talented as the insider to push him from his job. So that often a quite notorious incompetence may be tolerated.



THE CUTTER

A well-known case was that of an author, experienced in movie work, who was commissioned to write a story for a seven-reel film. He made his own continuity, the filming of which consumed twenty reels of film. With the best will in the world, the director could not cut it down to an inch less than fifteen reels. At enormous expense another expert was hired who managed to cut it to twelve, but there it stuck. Finally the first author was called in again, was paid another big fee, and succeeded in reducing it to the stipulated length. He was hailed as a saviour instead of being cursed in the first place as an incompetent.

## *Chapter VII*

### HOLLYWOOD—THE AUTHORS

*I*F you are in the ring of Hollywood you are in ; and if you are out only one "Sesame" will open the doors. This is notoriety of almost any kind, notoriety which has not too closely invited the attention of the police. But this feeling for notoriety is one that calculates on quantity rather than on quality ; thus, Hollywood gathers to its bosom for trial any author or playwright who touches the best-seller apex, no matter whether his particular product is suitable for moving-picture production or no. It gathers them in at £1440 a time, and if it cannot digest spews them out again in six months. In some cases an author may refuse to be tempted by the bait. Then Hollywood often becomes yet more desirous, refusing to swallow such a snub. Exaggerated anecdotes often put a point to ordinary facts as a caricature may reveal the character of a man. Here, then, is a story that Hollywood tells of the great Mr Sam Silberstein.

First we must explain that most movie magnates have risen meteorically from tiny beginnings. The earliest studios were little more than converted garages, and the earliest producers often chance-takers of small education, though quick to see the future of the new industry.

A certain blend of ability, arrogance, flamboyance, rashness, and deficiency of culture that marks many a movie magnate has, in popular legend, been concentrated on the well-known figure of Sam Silberstein, whom Hollywood is amused to make the Mrs Malaprop of the films, and accumulates stories real or legendary about him.

They say, for instance, that he was visiting one of the

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

studios during the making of a well-known film representing the life of Our Saviour, a film ironically enough undertaken with Jewish money for Jewish profit, yet so respectfully carried out that important notices forbade, under pain of instant dismissal, any blasphemy on the sets during the filming. The great Mr Silberstein entered as the Last Supper was in progress.

"Hello! What's doing here?" he asked.

"This," explained the director, "is one of the key scenes of the whole play. It is the Last Supper."

"What!" exclaimed Mr Silberstein, aghast. "One of the key scenes of the whole play and you get up a mean little supper like that! Say, don't you know your business? Why don't you get in a coupl'a dozen extras and make it a fine big banquet that'll tell properly?"

During Maeterlinck's tour of the United States Mr Silberstein, always ready to seize a notoriety, especially of a literary nature, determined to have a movie story written by the great Belgian. But M. Maeterlinck was coy. The more he declined to write for the movies the more the magnate insisted.

"All we want is joost a little story. Three or four pages. Just your usual stuff. An' we pay . . ."

Here he tried in vain to take the famous author's breath away by offering enormous sums in dollars. At last, worn out perhaps by Mr Silberstein's persistence, Maeterlinck agreed to write the play on the condition that he was to choose his own subject and be paid whether the picture was filmed or no.

"Dat's all right," said Mr Silberstein. "Where it don't fit the movies we've got experts that'll make it fit. Mind, we want just your ordinary stuff. Wot you make your name with. . . ."

Even then the famous author seemed reluctant to get to

## *Hollywood—The Authors*

work. Telegrams poured in on him from the anxious Mr Silberstein, demanding to know the earliest possible date of delivery. At last the precious manuscript arrived. It was borne with ceremonious care to the office of Mr Silberstein and laid on his desk. The studio waited tense to hear the magnate's verdict. Suddenly he burst from his office waving the papers and tearing his hair.

"Look at this!" he cried. "Look here! I hire him, don't I? 'Do your usual stuff,' I say to him. . . ."

"What's the matter? Is it a bum play then?"

"The play is all right," cried Mr Silberstein. "But what's the use of that? He's given me a hero what's a bee."

One day in the restaurant Mr Dick came up to us.

"See that table over there in the corner?" he said, in a respectful voice. "Perhaps you know who that is?"

We gazed at the table, but among the company could see no one of our acquaintanceship.

"I thought maybe you might know him," said Mr Dick. "That's your famous English author, Mr L——. We've just hired him to come out and write a story for us. Yes, and we have had to transport his whole family over here, with his private footman and his wife's maid and his own automobile, all the way from England. And we are lodging them all at the Hollywood Hotel. It's sure fine publicity. Didn't you see the papers?"

We did not learn whether Mr L—— consented to be shut in one of the boxes of the Stenographic Department, but we did hear that, as his story developed, a certain anxiety was manifested by the supervising staff of the company. They were uncertain whether Mr L——'s story would be intelligible to the female audiences of America as represented by, say, the flappers of Oshkosh. Mr L—— was reported to have answered that he was writing one of his typical stories, and that he didn't care a hoot whether it was intelligible to

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

the flappers of Oshkosh or no. There was no doubt in our minds, in spite of Mr L——'s reputation as a serial writer for the more wealthy of the popular magazines, that a movie story by him might well be less suitable for film work than one of a young hack writer in the Stenographic Department.

Miss Wynne left California soon after our visit. She had enjoyed her six-months change and had earned her £1440 as well as the trousseau, but of all her stories not even that of the young man and the milk-cart reached production stage. Somewhere in the hands of the continuity-man it faded and disappeared. Isaacs too, a brilliant young Chicago Jew, was retained for eight months, his salary amounting to some £2000, and yet of all his trial stories not one was finally shot. And both Miss Wynne and Joseph Isaacs were picked out from among young American authorship and financially abducted across the continent.

Sam Ornitz had been luckier. He was the author of two novels, the first a brilliant and human study of the rise and fall of a corrupt Jewish lawyer-politician, a study which Sam's own upbringing, his early companionships, and his final experiences in New York had allowed him to present with all the truth of portraiture from life. The second novel had been more ambitious, the study of a Roman Catholic in the States. It was marked by a powerful sense of finesse, combined with the invention of words and of drama, distinguished in its sense of character-drawing and analysis. But neither novel, we must confess, would have suggested to us that here was a predestined writer of film stories. There was a grimness even in his humour that seemed to promise ill if employed for the task of enthralling the young women of Oshkosh. His characters were depicted with such unrelenting realism that an unobservant public might have mistaken them for grotesque caricature.

And, indeed, Sam Ornitz's first story had not been accept-

able. Luckily, Von Sternberg with his practised eye had seen in a subsidiary incident the promise of an original theme. This he pointed out to Ornitz, and urged him to rewrite it. And this second story, so fortunately developed from the first failure, was the play that Von Sternberg was going to shoot as soon as *The Docks* was finished.

Normally Sam Ornitz was of an avuncular temperament. He looked at the world through big spectacles benignantly, while on his curious mouth the hint of a smile was always lurking, as though he had just thought of a new and amusing idea. Below this skin of good humour he was a serious and even a spiritually suffering man, seldom taking part in the loud-voiced duels of badinage, repartee, or pun that were as much substitutes for conversation as the alcoholic decoctions were substitutes for sound liquor.

One day we met him on the lot; his smile seemed twisted, the good humour was missing from his eyes.

"They are fixing up my story," he said, in answer to our inquiries. "It is enough to make any man look sick. To begin with, I can't bear that continuity-man, and he likes me as little as I do him. And how, I would ask you, is any kind of collaboration going to be successful in such circumstances? But, of course, the studio can't take any account of one's likes or dislikes. I am assigned to somebody, and I have to put up with him. That's all. It may be business, though it isn't art. Did I ever tell you how my story goes? No. Well, I'll tell you, and then you'll understand. It's about an unmarried mother. She's been seduced and has a baby, which is the only thing she lives for. In fact, to provide for it she is at last driven to the streets. Then one of these interfering societies—America is lousy with them—steps in and has the baby taken from her. Says she isn't fit to bring it up. Why, they might as well tear the heart from her. The rest of the play shows the girl's attempts to drag herself

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

back to social respectability to get the child again. That is my story. Only a simple bit of life. But it is somewhat different from the ordinary movie plot, I think. And Von Sternberg is taking it on as soon as he has finished *The Docks of New York*. I was glad to get him, because he is a good director; he has artistic and realistic ideas, and wants to do things differently. But you know that continuity-man of his. Have you noticed how he always is trying to drag Von Sternberg down to the banal, always with his mind on the box office? And he has my story to make over. First they say: 'Look here, Sam, we've just done a story with that kind of atmosphere in it; we can't do two, one after the other, exactly alike.' And so they have a brilliant idea. They are going to set it in Vienna—1850—and they are going to open the story with a carnival. Hell! What have I to do with a carnival in 1850? Then they say: 'Look here, Sam, we can't make her exactly a street-walker; we'll just have to make it so she's poor and can't nourish the kid properly.' Then they say: 'You know, old man, this unmarried-mother stuff won't go with the great American public, so we'll have to make it seem like she was seduced by the young man of the house; then he gets killed by accident, or something, and she has lost her secret marriage licence. But in the end, after she has worked up and got the child back, he turns up and proves that she was married to him after all.' Now what do you think of that?

"But that is the way these movie stories get made. And I'm going to get a thousand dollars' bonus on it, so I have to keep my mouth shut, because I've got a wife and kids over here. And to think that some of us come across imagining that we are the wise boys and are going to reform the movies! Bah!"

"We lunched with a supervisor the other day," I said, "and he told us that you were all making the folk-art of

## *Hollywood—The Authors*

the future. And folk-art admits a number of authors to any plot. In fact, every new teller gives the tale a new twist until some chap comes along and writes it down and kills it dead. You are suffering the fate of the folk-author, Sam."

"Folk-author?" said Ornitz. "Tell me. How does this folk-art develop? Every story-teller borrows from his neighbour; that's all right. But he doesn't borrow his tales thinking of the box office; he borrows them because he enjoys them himself. He is tickling his own imagination, isn't he? And the tale is given life not because the audience can distinguish between good and bad, but because some other tale-teller likes it enough to memorize it. We talk about folk-art as though it were a popular art, but it never was. Folk-art was always an artist's art, and the people had to take it or lump it. It was an art that owed its life to the appreciation of the poets themselves. Folk-art has never had an eye on the box office. I'll tell you why folk-art has such a superb quality. It is the most independent art that ever existed; it was never bought."

The evolution of a movie story has only this in common with folk-art: it is an art that passes through a number of hands before it reaches its final stage. The author writes it. The continuity-man splits it into scenes and modifies it to suit the box office. The gag-man (now called comedy consultant in the superior nomenclature imposed by the demands of publicity) adds a few gay episodes. The director remoulds it in order to introduce scenic devices that he has thought out. The supervisor, to earn his fabulous salary, knocks out a few of the scenes as bad for receipts. The stars, if sufficiently important, may be allowed to propose amendments in order to swing it more in line with their particular temperaments, thus saving them the trouble of too much acting. Finally, Publicity may have a word in the matter. But, as Ornitz suggested, the difference between the movie plot and the

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

folk-tale is this : not one of the interlopers, except perhaps the author himself, is working on the thing for his own intellectual amusement or pleasure ; he is working with his eye on the box-office receipts. Over the heads of almost every one who touches the plot there looms, like the mummy at the Egyptian feast, the ghosts of the sheriff, the parson, and the flapper of Oshkosh. But the young woman of the States,



THE REAL FILM DICTATORS—SHERIFF, FLAPPER, AND PARSON

that product of English-German-Polish-Italian-Swedish-Russian-Portuguese intermarriage bred in an American climate, is the ultimate dictator of movie art ; you may slip a thing by the sheriff or the parson without affecting financial returns in the least, but she must be satisfied at all costs or the receipts fall off. If folk-tales had been modified in deference to the opinions of the young women of the primitive audiences, folk-tales would not be worth the recording.

So Sam Ornitz's tale, had it fallen into the hands of folk-tellers, might have passed through a hundred variations. At the end it might have been almost unrecognizable as

## Hollywood—The Authors

stemming from the original version ; it might have become fabulous, fantastic, bitter, or ironical, but it would certainly not have become the series of romantic novelette platitudes, the thing that it was when it finally reached the public.

A short while ago an odd American work came to our notice. It was called *The Art of Attracting Men*, and was a series of eight progressive brochures instructing the young American woman in the means to win herself a husband. It was a cynical, frank, and terrifying summing up of the sexual problem. It included fourteen infallible rules for cultivating a "winsome and cuddlesome character." It defined the five distinct phases of man's sexual progress toward marriage : attention, interest, desire, judgment, and action. It warned girls, however, never to force on the action stage "until the man is ripe." "Many a girl has failed because she was too impatient to wait and allow the man's holy passion time to grow." But when the action stage was reached a number of different devices for urging on the proposal were suggested, or, as the book put the thing, "stimulating the necessary sentimental emotion." Of these the cinema was one. The Attractor of Men was warned to avoid films with a tendency toward the vampire, the gay, the wicked, or the criminal. "If when he leaves the theatre he has a lump in his throat he is likely to forget all about money matters." So we must recognize this factor as one of the obstacles before the sincere author who, in spite of his £60 a week, may have an ambition to reform the movies.

The adventures of a story once it has passed into the movie studio may be carried to almost any heights of apparent farce and yet be perfectly true. Indeed, Mr Van Vechten's *Spider Boy* might well be, in most of its details, a simple relation of the facts. The film *The Way of All Flesh*, for instance, touched the original at no point except that of one quotation from Samuel Butler. During the filming of his first

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

masterpiece Ornitz was engaged to help in the remodelling of a novel bought for Emil Jannings.

The book itself had cost a considerable sum and could not be calmly passed through the hands of a mere continuity, for Jannings himself, a star of high ingenuity, apart from his really great powers of acting, was careful to oversee the shaping of all his own films. Thus in general he achieved the unity and coherence of his productions. In fact, this quality may be noticed in the work of a few of the more important stars, such as Chaplin, Fairbanks, Jannings, Von Stroheim, and some others, who, by shaping their stories round their own characters, do make a complete pattern of what is usually a rather chancy patchwork.

The book bought for Jannings contained, they say, the adventures of a man and a horse. The man was the horse's keeper, and the point of the story was to show how well, in America, a horse as immigrant is treated in comparison with a man.

The remodelling committee included Jannings himself, his interpreter (for Mr Jannings, in spite of the fact that he has since produced a talking-picture in English, at that time spoke little of the tongue), Jannings' director, his continuity, and two consultant authors, Ornitz and Isaacs. Of these the lowest paid were Ornitz and Isaacs, each receiving £60 per week.

After several weeks of intensive reconstruction nothing was left of the original story except the man and the horse, which they might have plucked from nature in the first place for nothing. And then Jannings, famous for the promptitude and obstinacy of his decisions, said that he did not like the theme after all and would not play it.

Ornitz showed a peculiar aptitude for the work of a movie author. In a very short time he had invented two more acceptable plays, a remarkable record to the credit of so new

## Hollywood—The Authors

a practitioner. For his first story he had received a bonus in addition to his normal weekly salary, although the finished product resembled the original little more than the ever-prevalent popular and democratic tomato-sauce resembles the fresh, refined real tomato. He had also been allotted the larger cubicle vacated by Miss Wynne. For his second play he received, we understood, some £400, and felt so wealthy that he was able to move from the modest bungalow dictated by his Eastern ambitions into a real house, to buy a Buick car (that certificate of gentility), and to hire a Japanese chauffeur. The task of earning this extra £400 had been little more than the perception of an incongruous contrast in the personalities of two stars, that of Noah Beery with that of Florence Vidor, the smartest of Society types. Then he had devised a *milieu* in which these two could naturally meet and love, Chinatown. After that, with his previous experience of a story in the hands of the continuity, he left the plot almost virgin in blankness. Clearly Ornitz was learning the ropes; whatever the story he had written might be, it would have come out like the majority of its predecessors, a compromise with Oshkosh femininity. So he saved himself the trouble by writing as little as he could.

Many of the Chinatown scenes were taken at night. The Chinatown streets had been hastily transformed from a German set, which before that had been a street in a French provincial town, and before that goodness knows what. Now and again we would meet him wandering disconsolately through this false slum. He seemed to be suffering from an evil fascination, attracted like the murderer to the spot of his crime, and from time to time he noted and shuddered at Oshkoshian alterations, even to the slight sketch he had provided.

"They've gone and made Aaron a Harvard graduate who's gone wrong," he muttered. "I know that he will end as the long-lost son of a millionaire."

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

At midnight the company broke off to take refreshment in the studio restaurant, and on one evening we chanced to dine with a young couple whose acquaintance we had made, imagining them to be extra actors. However, after a reference to Ornitz's story the two laughed.



NIGHT IN CHINATOWN

“Ornitz's story!” said the youth; “precious lot he had to do with it. All he suggested was putting Beery and Miss Vidor into the same act. I think we should know where the story came from. Why, this lady here thought of the plot, and I did the continuity. And Ornitz gets his name on it, and a big bonus as well. . . .”

Few hired collaborators are ever just to one another. The fact remained that Ornitz moved into a bigger house; while a Buick car is an undeniable stamp of efficiency.

Well might he move. His contract provided him with

## *Hollywood—The Authors*

£3120 a year, and he had already earned another thousand pounds within his first six months of hired authorship. Hollywood might imagine that Sam was on the high road to success. To a man who was but recently a subordinate official in a New York social organization, who wrote his first novel in moments snatched during the evening after a laborious day, or on holidays, in a cramped flat disturbed by the boisterousness of two young children, this might well seem a leap into affluence. Compared with the work that he used to do, and in contrast with the actual conditions under which he had produced two books that the good critics had all recognized as very remarkable, this sitting in a cubicle and thinking out plots might seem child's play. Ornitz's situation might seem almost ideal to most people.

Yet since the day that he had arrived in Hollywood not one line of real imaginative prose had he written. A sense of exasperated sterility had fallen upon him, a feeling of sterility that drives many to a refuge so common in Hollywood that it may be in some sort considered as an index. This solace had already attracted young Isaacs, whom one rarely saw later than six o'clock in a sober condition.

One cannot be on the upper heights and the lower slopes of a mountain simultaneously—a fact that is as undeniable in æsthetic creation as in everyday life. One cannot take advantage of the financial reward for trivial work and spend one's spare time in creating masterpieces of literature. Young Mrs Ornitz, in spite of her love and sympathy, found this fact a most hard and unkind tweak of Fate's ironic humour. She had pluckily backed him up during their years of struggle; she had borne him two vigorous boys. In New York she had seen her husband turn to his task after tiring days in the courts. Now, she imagined, should be the time of reward. Why, with all this, could one not be quite content? Slowly she realized that in New York her husband could

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

plunge nightly into literature as a relief and an ever-blessed refuge. His everyday task there could not break into the secret chambers of his mind. But here his daily task was too closely akin to the one he had cherished as a refuge. It verged so much on the other that it could take on the characteristics of an obsession. His mind now tended to reduce all thoughts to the possibility of their becoming movie plays. An artist cannot serve both God and Mammon. He must be an ideal artist or a commercial artist, and if necessity binds him to the lower grade his mind may be longing constantly for the clear feeling of the heights that are denied him. He then accumulates an increasing charge of regret and exasperation. Only two courses are open to him: he must resolutely climb back to the heights and be satisfied with the rewards that the gods send him, or he must determine to content himself with the valleys. How many a young artist has thought to himself: "I will do commercial art till I have banked enough to keep me in comfort, and then I will do ideal art"? But talents need to be exercised, and many a man has finally confessed that the compromise proved to be a failure and has been obliged to admit that he had sacrificed his higher possibilities for the benefits of commerce.

In this way Hollywood is a real menace to the younger writers of America. Sixty pounds a week is a tempting lure for mere plot-making. Some, like Miss Wynne, were automatically protected because their talents did not meet with movie approval, although young Isaacs had further to protect himself by remaining almost consistently intoxicated during the greater part of his stay there. But to authors such as Ornitz, who showed a natural ingenuity that adapted them to the demands of the films, the danger was great. He had certain safeguards. He had a strong consciousness of the mental aridity of the place, a sensation felt by most cultivated New Yorkers. He had a desire to do his work for the work's sake,

## *Hollywood—The Authors*

the wholly non-commercial artist, and he was at heart a social rebel. On the other hand, he suffered from the temptations that luxury could bring to one who had known small coddling in childhood; he had the needs of his wife and family, that imperious urge to higher, higher luxury that is an American obsession; and he had the flattering admiration of directors and supervisors (for admiration offered even by mere wealth is a lure difficult to resist when it is backed by the concentrated suggestion of a hundred million people).

## Chapter VIII

### LOS ANGELES-CUM-HOLLYWOOD

THE name of the street in which Sam Ornitz lived does not matter, but the number of his house was one thousand seven hundred and fifty-three, which indicated its position in the town, since, however much the street names might change, the numberings of the houses marched onward east, west, north, or south from the two main streets of this widespread city. At the bottom corner of Ornitz's street was Graumann's Chinese Theatre, where the footprints of famous movie stars have been stamped into the imperishable cement of the *patio*, to become prizes perhaps for some future geologist who may ponder over them as we ponder over a track of the brontosaurus. Across this corner ran Hollywood Boulevard, which was flushed each afternoon with the cars of the movie population, great and small, rubbing mudguards with a determined gaiety, bounding on block by block as the automatic traffic-signals permitted, progressing thus to and from the set or the sea in much the same spasmodic manner as their films were made.

This street one thousand seven hundred-odd houses away from the east-west backbone of the town sloped upward, though not steeply. Hollywood Boulevard might be taken as the boundary-line between the residential hills and the great bungalow plain which included three-quarters of the whole city of Los Angeles. In this street trees still obscured the view, but a little higher up—say among the two thousands north—you could poke your head over the tree-tops and consider the town in a *coup d'œil*. Beyond the two thousands the hills curved upward in a wide semicircle, hills green

## *Los Angeles-cum-Hollywood*

during three months of the year, but for the rest baked a dull, tawny, eye-tiring brown. In these hills sprouted the palaces of the great Movie Great, the houses of the middle Movie Great (clustered into real estate communities and colonies), or blocks of flats for the small Movie Great. Below, across the bungalow plains, stretched the courts, the rooming-houses, and the square-blocked suburbia of the Movie Small merging into Los Angeles itself, homeland of the Iowan emigrant. The great plain stretched out as far as the eye could penetrate the thin Californian mist, covered with two-storeyed houses, ranked two thousand deep to the main street and then spreading their numberless thousands still farther beyond. Four hundred square miles of them.

Hollywood is but a tenth part of this four hundred square miles of household monotony. Yet, except for the central business blocks of Los Angeles itself, clustered about the tall white tower of the City Hall, few promontories of building stand out. The few that do are usually apartment-houses or hotels, each towers of speculative building, towers that scrape no skies, for the land gamblers, seeing their profits from an extension of land sales rather than from upward aspirations that would profit none but the builders, forced an edict through the town council limiting the height to twelve storeys.

In spite of the crouching appearance of this extensive city, and in spite of the fact that the movies are claimed to be America's fourth largest industry, a casual visitor might drive in and round about the place and hardly suspect that the movies exist, unless he came upon the big, truncated liner of the Lasky lot rearing its decks above the surrounding bungalow roofs.

It is a strange, unreal town, this Los Angeles-cum-Hollywood, a chimera, a kind of human-house disease breaking out on the desert's face. It is a wilful town, grown there

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

for no reason except that of climate; a tourist town that draws a hundred and sixty million dollars' worth of tourists to it a year. Yet there is nothing for them to look at when they arrive. The oil that brings in a hundred and seventy millions of its yearly income was not discovered till after the foundation, and the movies that contribute a hundred and thirty millions are themselves but a few years old. It is a town of a million Middle Western farmers, children of Middle Western farmers, and parasites on Middle Western farmers; it is a refuge where such people, worn out and spiritually overwhelmed by the immensities of the great echoless wheat-plains, can huddle happily in a four-hundred-square-mile labyrinth of the flimsiest and craziest city buildings that history has ever seen. The domestic architecture is of every imaginable variety, from old English cottages to Mexican Rococo, from Arabian or Assyrian to Maya, from Irish inns carted over lock, stock, and barrel and embedded in a movie star's beach house to Greek shrines numbered like a jig-saw puzzle and shipped across in cases. Architecture pure, pastiched, or mixed pickles; architecture of lath and plaster, flimsy as the reputation of those whom it houses, making one believe that the movie lots are a contagious disease.

The town has spread over the desert soil, sprouting here, withering there; here dense clusters of pocket-living citizens with their noses in each other's back-yards and their ears afflicted by each other's radios; there large stretches of fallow ground on which no respectable citizen would deign to build. These two aspects are intermingled without apparent rhyme or reason, except maybe the whim of the land speculators. Here a fortune has been realized by the lucky buyers; there the happiness of a hundred Iowan farms is still embedded in the desert dust. If one may talk of a town being repulsively clean this one is so. It seemed to us like a prim little girl at a party afraid to spoil her frock, or like



ALMOST ANY SUBURB

*Watercolour by Jan Gordon*



## *Los Angeles-cum-Hollywood*

a model town built in a shop-window to advertise house paints. Both the outsides and the insides of the houses had a pungent, varnished, unlived-in feeling. Houses they might be, but they had not become homes. Even the very hills, which became at last nerve-grating, because of their unchanging monotony of brown against the unchanging monotony of powder-blue sky, looked washed clean, as if the street-scrubbers gave them too a daily toilet. And all the clean white, pink, blue, yellow, orange, and green houses, with roofs of the latest shades of art tilings, nestled there among unalterably clean trees, that water brought three hundred miles from the great reservoir enabled to defy the desert.

On the plains were mile after mile of square white, pink, blue, yellow, orange, and green bungalows or bungalow courts, set in the middle of square green lawns, washed every day by sprinklers, surrounded by rigid lines of invariable pavement edged with palms or cypress-trees. For half a mile or so they seemed charming, but after a week's experience they became maddening in their self-contented monotony.

Thirty miles away, over roads plastered with land speculators' advertisements which clamoured in vivid colours "This is the Riviera," "Turn to the right for Engadine," "Make your home on the Monaco Estate," Los Angeles-cum-Hollywood splashed against the Pacific Ocean at Santa Monica. Here to the south was the garish amusement city, with several miles of switchbacks, dance-halls, Luna Parks, ice-cream stalls, hot-dog restaurants, and so on, where the maidens doffed their short, revealing skirts and put on pyjamas for greater freedom. To the right the road turned under high cliffs called the Pacific Palisades and, after passing through a purgatory of half-tumbledown shacks, came to the heaven of a rest beach, many miles of sand

## Star-dust in Hollywood

protected by barbed wire and gates, patrolled by men on horseback armed with revolvers, who would throw out on to the road anyone who had not purchased a right to be there.

Here the Movie Great have bought strips of sand and a piece of sea all to themselves. Here they rest, huddled once more in each other's pockets, fearing the menace of solitude,



NIGHT LOCATION ON MALIBU BEACH

living in pavilions sometimes built like stranded yachts or lighthouses.

Here one day we were privileged to watch Mr Brennan's carpenters and decorators building an erection supposed to be the shelter of a Moslem pirate who was camping on a Malay foreshore, a scene from the film of *The Rescue*. While his carpenters and decorators were allowed to put up as wild a fantasy as ever came out of the merest music-hall entertainment, presuming apparently that pirates carried with them painters, carvers, and decorators as well as supplies of paint, the director and his stars mixed an intensive study of Conrad with their lunch, paying an

## *Los Angeles-cum-Hollywood*

exaggerated amount of respect to the word (which really mattered little) and no respect at all to the image (which mattered much).

During the afternoon the road was encumbered with ponderous lorries bringing up an electric-lighting plant, engines, dynamos, and batteries of powerful arc-lamps that after dark illuminated this piece of decorator's whimsy with the concentrated power of their carbon candles. Malay pirates, plumed and accoutred like Zulus, manœuvred on the beach as though they paid respect to some pirate sergeant-major; a spectacle which saddened us so much that we returned home and made rude remarks to Ornitz on the subject; with a sequel to be recorded later.

Once again we took a drive along this Palisades road; this time a pleasure-trip on Independence Day, down to the sea in cars. An engineer friend and his wife invited us as an experiment in democracy to drive with them. If the English take their pleasures sadly the Americans have raised car-jaunting to a most dismal craze. To work up a conviviality proper to Independence Day we joined a procession of cars, bonnet to spare tyre, like a line of processional caterpillars, that crawled along the sea-front for some fifteen miles at an average speed of five miles an hour. All the way we breathed one another's exhaust gases mixed with ozone. Then, having come to the end of the road, we turned back and crawled home. We estimated that about a tenth of the car-owning population of Los Angeles joined this melancholy and insanitary procession. We have, it is true, a *penchant* for insanitary experiences, but only because they are so often amusing.

Sea and climate are the lures that bring the hundred and sixty million dollars' worth of tourists to Los Angeles-cum-Hollywood. The sea is certainly enjoyed. It is enjoyed *en masse* with a lusty, pagan abandon, though year by year,

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

as the great English landlords "stole the common from the goose," so the wealthy of Los Angeles-cum-Hollywood are stealing the beaches from the people. Rest beaches and expensive beach clubs, where the rich combine bathing and bridge, are turning the sands into 'real estate,' and will soon be setting up "No Trespassers" buoys on the very waves themselves.

The climate of Los Angeles-cum-Hollywood is a little like the benefits of Christianity—very much boasted about, but of little practical effect. For in this perfect climate we could not find one out-of-doors restaurant or tea-garden; the windows of all these white, pink, blue, yellow, orange, and green bungalows and houses are sealed with fly-blinds of copper net which steals from the Californian light a full 20 per cent. of its brilliance and effectually turns back any wandering zephyr that tries to visit the house. To keep out a few intrusive insects, for we saw no mosquitoes, the inhabitants have got into the fly-traps themselves and have given the flies the liberty of all out of doors. Who needs zephyrs when you can turn on the electric fan? Compared with the habits of the eastern States, there is little sitting out on the stoops, and, indeed, with the modern mangled examples of architecture, there are no stoops on which to sit. The lawns are spread round the bungalows, but nobody enjoys them in the cool of the evening. About 80 per cent. of the cars in which Los Angeles spends the greater part of its leisure are closed. The people may boast of their climate, but they drive about in glass boxes. As for the movies, they so despise the sun nowadays that they invariably help him out with batteries of arc-lamps, or else make him play the part of his own parasite, the moon.

However, justice no doubt lies between extremes. We shall add to our personal observations on Los Angeles-cum-Hollywood the town's opinion of itself, culled from the pages

## *Los Angeles-cum-Hollywood*

of the invaluable *American Mercury*, a patriotic catechism taught to all the children in the public schools :

*Question.* Where is the State of California situated?

*Answer.* On the front side of the American Continent, between the rest of the United States and the Pacific Ocean.

*Q.* Why is Southern California famous?

*A.* It contains Los Angeles.

*Q.* What is Los Angeles?

*A.* The climatic capital of the United States.

*Q.* To what has it been likened?

*A.* To paradise, heaven, Eden, and the Riviera.

*Q.* Which does it most resemble?

*A.* It is a happy combination of all of them.

*Q.* What is the population of Los Angeles?

*A.* 900,000 boosters. (Will be more to-morrow.)

*Q.* What is a booster?

*A.* One who knows a good thing and wants others to share it.

*Q.* Of whom does the population consist?

*A.* Mostly of people from Iowa, together with many former residents of other states and a sprinkling of native sons.

*Q.* Into what classes of people may the United States be divided?

*A.* Those who have already seen Southern California and those who intend to see it soon.

*Q.* What are the Eastern visitors called?

*A.* Tourists.

*Q.* What is a tourist?

*A.* A permanent resident in the bud.

*Q.* What things may a tourist see in and around Los Angeles that he does not see back East?

*A.* Oranges, ostriches, lemons, alligators, olives, missions, sardines, aqueducts, harbours, tunas, bungalows, abalones, loquats, casaba melons, horned toads, snow-covered peaks, submarine gardens, yuccas, eucalyptus, palms, pepper-trees, cafeterias, Thanksgiving celery, and Christmas strawberries.

The list is not long enough. He may see lodging-houses like Moslem temples, with domes and minarets lit up at night by searchlights buried in the grass, or restaurants like engine

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

round-houses, bowler hats, or cliff dwellings, or he may eat hot dogs and suck ice-cream cones under the skirts of a gigantic crinolined lady. He may find petrol-stations that imitate the Taj Mahal, bits of the Kremlin, or a pagoda; he may find a street of houses looking like the amputated tops of French *châteaux*, or he may find a grotesque house like a Russian's idea of an illustration to the verse:

There was a crooked woman  
Who lived in a crooked house;  
She had a crooked cat  
That caught a crooked mouse. . . .

He may find Mexican slums crouching under the soiled towers of half-exhausted oil-wells; he may find a bitumen swamp from which have been exhumed the skeletons of dozens of antediluvian animals. He may see by the roadside a site where ranks of enormous cows, huge racing automobiles, immense Cleopatras, giant pop-bottles cast in plaster, painted and gilded, are regimented, waiting to be transported to their strategic advertising positions. He may find a dozen weird temples of as many crazy religions, Foursquare Gospellers, Pillars of Fire, Holy Rollers, Voodoo precincts. . . . There are farms on which lions are being bred like puppies and are taught when young to keep their front feet out of their dinner-pails. There are Chinese, Japanese, and Italian quarters. The Mexican streets, to be perfectly frank, were the most sympathetic and human parts of all Los Angeles to us. There is a big negro district with its own theatre, staging plays with such exciting titles as *Red-hot Mamma*, and its own newspaper, from which we clipped the portrait of a negro gentleman in a noble pose over the caption:

### KEEPING PACE WITH PROGRESS

Mr Johnlittle continues to be numbered amongst those who are dedicated to the task of making Los Angeles great and grand. Mr Johnlittle is one of the leading sewer contractors of the city. . . .

## *Los Angeles-cum-Hollywood*

The tourist from the East will also find orange-groves in which each tree has a little petroleum stove beneath to keep it warm in the winter, and he will find an ocean so filmed over with the exhaust vomitings and the seepings from oil-tankers that the fish have fled to less tainted waters.

The town catechism did not add that Los Angeles-cum-Hollywood has the best museum of prehistoric animals in the world, the second-best public gallery of modern paintings in America, the best open-air concert auditorium, a natural amphitheatre called the Hollywood Bowl, and a perfectly good Passion play. The first was a gift of God. All the other three were the gifts of individuals who had to fight for their existence. Mr Preston Harrison's art gallery would long ago have been ousted from the museum but for his unceasing efforts, while Mrs Stevenson, who wrote and endowed the Passion play, had to battle against all the realtors of Los Angeles to be allowed to sell back to the city at the original price she paid for it the site of the Hollywood Bowl, which in the meanwhile had soared to millions in value.

However, to match the catechism here is an advertisement from a Los Angelesian suburb :

### ALHAMBRA, AN IDEAL FOSTERED IN COMMUNITY ART AND RECREATION

From Greece in the age of Pericles comes the groundwork of our democratic government in the "republic" of Plato, the basis of natural science in the syllogisms and categories of Aristotle, the beginnings of modern-day ethics in the teachings of Socrates, the origin of the drama in the works of Sophocles, an art and architecture of the Acropolis that has never been surpassed, and feats of valour at Salamis and Marathon that have been the wonders of the ages.

Back of this hundred years of unparalleled creative production was a great life principle—idealism—that lifted the Greek mind out of the shackles of material circumstance and fixed it upon the ideas of things behind the universe.

## Star-dust in Hollywood

Back of this Golden Age was an education based upon this idealism that made such leaders in government, art and thought as Pericles, Phidias, Sophocles, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle.

The youth was taught from the heroics of Homer to honour his State first, his father and mother second, and himself last. He was taken to the music master, where he was trained in body rhythms. He was taken to the master of the games to make his body strong and co-ordinated. He was taken to the Theatre of Dionysius to join the Choral Odes *that are like our Community Sings to-day*, and the dances and processions that are *like our pageants . . . etc. . . .*

In the revival to-day of our *pageants, community sings, our community players, and art associations*, of art as a civic force, we may see the promise of greatness to come.

Alhambra, *at the forefront of the revival*, is placing before its people a bond issue to build a great art centre with an amphitheatre that will seat 15,000, music and art studios and galleries for painting and sculpture. Here the city's pageants and singing festivals may be held, and art may become a vital force in the upbuilding of a richer city life. . . ."

The italics are our own.

Age of Pericles? Choral odes? Community sings concentrate on *Old Black Joe* or *Santa Lucia*. . . . A community art, dominated by the standardized products of the talkies as a theatre, by the *Saturday Evening Post* or *Liberty* as literature, and by the hoarse howlings of the commercialized and advertising radio as music, controlled by watch committees that burn publicly any outspoken book, by the police who would arrest Socrates without a warrant, and put him through the third degree as an I.W.W. if he showed his nose in the city limits, and by the twenty-six taboos of the film industry.

. . . . .

Yet Hollywood, embedded in Los Angeles, is not of Los Angeles. Jo used to call them the Cavaliers and the Round-

## *Los Angeles-cum-Hollywood*

heads. Hollywood tolerantly ignored that Los Angeles had any existence except as lords of the waterworks, the garbage-gatherers, and the sewage system, or when impudent Los Angeles business men declined to open credit accounts equivalent to a star's film reputation. Los Angeles, puritanical and suffering from an incipient attack of religious mania, really resented the fame of this mad colony which chance had thrust into her midst, and, though she bent to the lure of their incredible riches, she groaned audibly at their morals.

Three English notables, one royal, visited the Californian coast during the month of September. They were all travelling as private persons, but American democracy does not recognize *incognito*. These travellers all declined the invitations of the Chamber of Commerce and the Daughters of the Revolution, but they all went to watch Fairbanks producing *Twenty Years After*. The city of Los Angeles was so furious at the slight that—we learned through official circles—business with England suffered a serious set-back. Los Angeles took her temper out on British trade.

. . . . .

Ornitz had been to a party not half a mile from his own house. After the noise, the light, the whisky, the loud badinage, and the odours of mixed scents he was tempted by the blue coolness of the Californian night to walk back to his own home. Now and again a car flashed by; now and again a signal lamp winked and changed colour; otherwise the streets were deserted and silent.

The still charm of this Hollywood nocturne was infinitely refreshing to the writer's nerves. He walked along rejoicing in the solitude and inhaling the freshness that night always brings to California, a treacherous freshness which sometimes may turn the softness of this climate to a sudden pneumonia trap.

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

A policeman's voice broke across his musings :

"Hey, there! Stop you! Now then, whadjer creeping about the streets like this at this hour of the night for?"

"I was just walking, enjoying the night," replied the astonished author.

"Ya don't tell me," retorted the policeman. "Come on, out with it. What's the game?"

"But I have been to a friend's house," protested Ornitz. "I'm merely walking home."

"See here, bo!" said the policeman menacingly. "What kind of a mutt do you take me for, hey? Walking home!" He flashed his light over Ornitz's clothes. "Folks of your kind don't walk home. They rides automobileels if they're honest."

He gripped the author and ran an expert hand down his side searching for a revolver or a set of burgling-tools. Luckily, Ornitz had not even a pocket-flask.

"Say!" exclaimed the exasperated cop, not finding the expected weapon. "What is your little game?"

"I really am walking home," answered Ornitz. "I live only about three blocks from here."

"You gotter show me," said the cop gruffly, "or you'll come round and explain yourself at headquarters."

Mrs Ornitz was forced to come downstairs from bed and identify her husband, accused of using boot-leather after dark.

"Say, bo!" said the policeman, as he turned away. "Ain't you got no automobileel?"

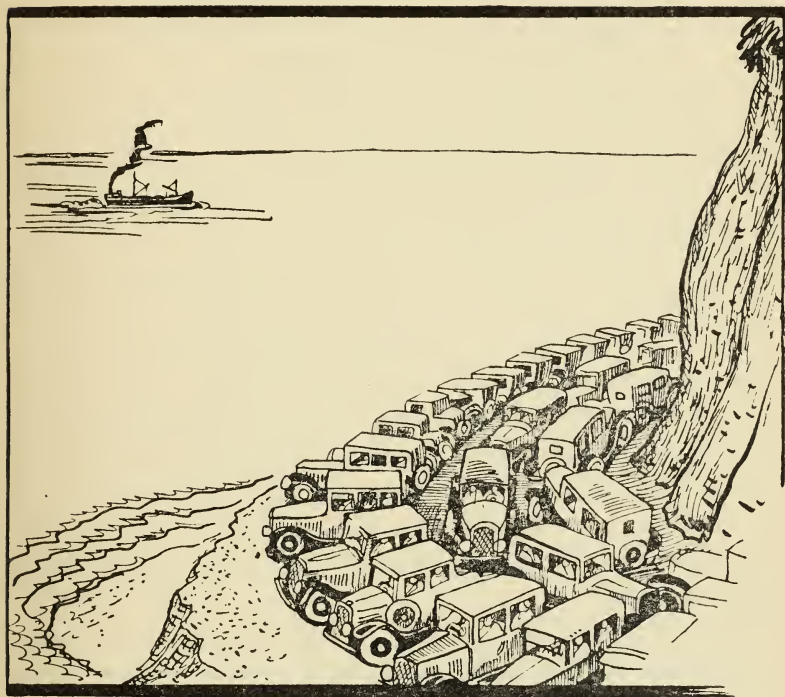
"Of course I have," replied the author.

"Then take my advice. Don't you go running round on your feet after dark like that no more. It mightn't be properly understood by some of us, see?"

. . . . .

## *Los Angeles-cum-Hollywood*

On October 21, 1928, eighteen highwaymen were reported in the city area: ten of these were known to be armed. None of them was pedestrian, for in a town that had an average of fifty car thefts a day, or some eighteen thousand car thefts a year, he would have been a fool bandit that went afoot.



A CALIFORNIAN HOLIDAY

## *Chapter IX*

### HOLLYWOOD—THE STARS

**S**TARS, mere human beings, often imperfectly educated, who earn from a thousand pounds a week and upward, are difficult to meet on equal terms. According to the opinion of the publicist or the satirist respectively, there are only two lenses by which they may be observed clearly: the magnifying close-up or that diminishing glass, the bottom of a whisky tumbler. The first star with whom we came in contact showed himself in both lights soon after our arrival.

We had been engaged to lecture at the Friday Morning Club, a weekly orgy of lectures and lunch for the seriously cultured among the Los Angeles ladies. This inhalation of culture started at 10.30 in the morning. Until lunch-time an expensively hired lecturer talked in the big theatre. Afterward the whole gathering was elevated two storeys to an equally large lunch-hall with a low balcony. Here an elaborate but strictly non-fattening lunch culminated in more talks delivered from the balcony to the replete but still culture-avid members.

We do not know if a correspondence in subject was designed between the before-lunch and the after-lunch lectures. As a rule we think not. On the day that we lectured before lunch on "the artistic intelligence of the illiterate" we were, after lunch, followed by Mr Tom Mix, the well-known cowboy impersonator—the two-gun man, the rescuer of distressed damsels from nefarious cattle-lifters—the man whom no odds could daunt, no frowns of fortune dismay.

First Mr Mix's publicity manager took the stand. He eulogized Mr Mix, judiciously staging a speech which he

## *Hollywood—The Stars*

deemed suitable to the mentality of the club. Presenting the magnificent close-up, he said :

“Ladies, I wish to prove to you that Mr Mix’s art is one that should be strongly supported by all right-thinking men and women in the United States. There never has been, and I can assure you that there never will be, a situation in any one of Mr Mix’s films that could call a blush to the cheek of the most refined young maiden. . . . Mr Mix’s films are founded in purity of ideal and purity of purpose. . . . And, ladies, I am now going to reveal to you a fact about Mr Mix’s character that will prove the truth of my statements. Ladies, Mr Mix has never smoked a cigarette in the whole of his life. . . .”

When *The Belle of New York* first came to England I thought that the verses

With grief intense,  
And at great expense,  
We strive to destroy  
Vicious habits in our neighbours;  
But we regret  
That the cigarette  
Gives a loud ha-ha  
To our very best endeavours,

were intended to be satire carried to absurdity. But in America we have learned that it is little more than a mild statement of fact. The smoking of a cigarette has, in certain circles of temperance reform, been magnified to a misdemeanour almost comparable with adultery. Christian America is trying to undo the ‘evil’ that aboriginal America brought on the world in discovering the tobacco-plant. The cigarette is persecuted with unfailing persistence, although we have not learned whether there is an anti-tobacco-chewing movement.

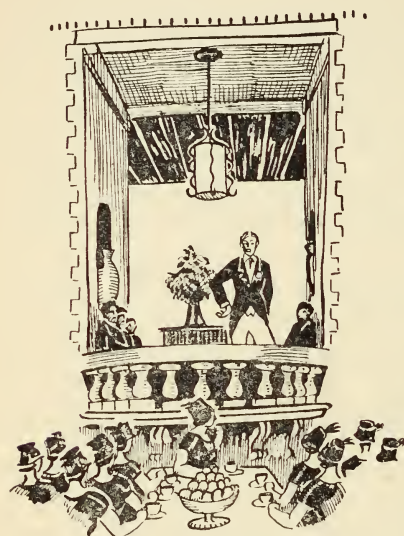
On the balcony Mr Mix looked more insignificant than his films would have led one to suppose. No doubt the lack

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

of 'chaps,' and of the two-gallon hat and the six-shooters, detracted from his impressiveness; his hair seemed to be thinning toward the top, and his reedy voice promised no he-man's success in the new rise of the talking pictures: it was strained, dry, and toneless. Not with such a voice could

one hold up a bar full of well-heeled cow-punchers.

"Ladies," said Mr Mix, "I am sure proud of what my manager has been able to tell you about me, but it is no more than the truth. I never did smoke a cigarette in my life, and I'm never going to. And I tell you here that if for the purposes of my work I have to seem to smoke a cigarette in my films I allus uses a medicated kind that don't contain one speck of tobacco. . . .



MR MIX LECTURES

"Now, ladies, I got to approach a subject which I'm questioned about quite a lot: my attitude towards Prohibition. Well, ladies, all I have to say is that I'm a good American citizen. I think that says a whole lot, for it means that in my opinion a good American citizen keeps laws. If they make laws for my country I feel as it's up to me to obey them laws. So I don't drink nothing 'tall. And even if I goes outside of my country I reckon that, seeing as I'm a good American citizen, I gotta hold by my country's laws whether I'm in my country or outside of it. So, ladies, you can take it straight from me that even if I goes to Yurup I don't never let a drop of fermented licker pass my lips.

## *Hollywood—The Stars*

That's the way I sees my duty as a true American citizen, ladies.

"Now, I often been asked about my career. I can tell you this, which perhaps you'll find interesting. Several years ago m'wife and I figured to quit the pictures, and with what we'd got we'd buy a ranch somewheres and settle down good. But one day, ladies, as I was going along the street, I came to a cinema palace where they was giving one of my films. And, ladies, there was a line of young boys standing outside of that movie house waiting to get in so's to see me. And as I come along the road them boys sees who I am; they reckernizes me, and one bumps the other with their elbows, and they say to each other: 'See who that is? Why, that's Tom Mix, our hero.'

"Then I realizes, ladies, that God has given me a task to do in this life. I realized, ladies, as I'd never realized before, that I was the ideal of young American boyhood. I realized that young America had, so to speak, grown up under my shadder. And I goes home to the wife, and I says: 'We can't quit like we was planning to do. I got my dooty to do to young America, and as long as God gives me health and strength to carry on I'm going to do it.'

"Now, ladies, I often been asked how I do my work. Well, first I'll tell you I don't never use substitutes. I don't let no man take a danger for pay that I daren't take myself. So the first thing I sees to is that all our material is in first-class condition; no accidents on account of anything breaking. Then I see my physical condition is as good as exercises and such can make it. No accidents on account of bad physical condition. And then, ladies," went on Mr Mix, rising on his toes and leaning over the balustrade and shaking his open hand to emphasize his grand climax, "then, ladies, if any accident should happen to me in the course of my playing I'll be sure that it's the voice of

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

God Himself saying to me : ' Tom Mix, retire ; your work is finished.' "

Amid the rounds of applause that greeted this convincing statement the older and more puritan of the members dropped tears of joy into their coffee-cups, thanking heaven that this one was not as others—not as Charlie Chaplin, for instance, a film of whom had been refused in Chicago because in one of the scenes a bowl of goldfish was upset into his trousers. This in Chicago, ruled by corrupt politicians, bankrupt so that it cannot pay its school-teachers or hospital staffs, the native haunt of murderous gangsters, who are winked at by the police and by many of the justices !

Mr Mix was clearly presenting himself to the ladies of the Friday Morning Club by the magnifying end of the telescope, but a few weeks later the telescope was reversed when Mr Mix was hauled before the courts for ' plugging ' a girl dancer in the eye at a booze-party. Before the court Mr Mix did not present so heroic a figure. He no longer seemed to be the ideal of young American boyhood. In the box he protested that he was not a rough character at all, but an actor, and that, in spite of his film heroics, he had never exchanged an angry blow in his life. The damages claimed were large, and Mr Mix was ready to swear that he was a person of very little natural courage, psychologically incapable of ' plugging ' a woman in the eye. . . . All his life he had tried to avoid anything unpleasant. . . . Luckily, the members of the Friday Morning Club did not recall this champion of Prohibition to explain his presence at what was obviously a very hot party. There is a saying in America : " You can't condemn a million dollars." Mr Mix was acquitted.

. . . . .

Of nine other stars whom we came to know only two had been actors. One had been an acrobat, one a music-hall

## *Hollywood—The Stars*

dancer, one a general in the Russian army, one a university professor, one a farmer, one a waiter, and one a sailor. Of these nine only three were what we could call men of education, but their respective positions in the salary scale—that is to say, in the world's estimation—were in the order following :

<i>Fixed Stars</i>	{ Actor Waiter Actor
<i>Planets</i>	{ Sailor Farmer Acrobat
<i>Minor Stars</i>	{ Professor Dancer General

Among the first six only one had been born with any expectation of reaching even a moderate position in the world. The others had no experience or training in the restraint necessary to the possession of a fortune.

The motto of Hollywood seemed to be the refrain of an old sentimental song :

With no to-morrow and no yesterday.

The huge salaries earned were spent as though these few wealthy years could never know an end, as though popularity could never wane, and as though age could not wither, nor custom stale. They behaved as if the movies were the purse of Fortunatus.

And yet there are warnings enough. The fluffy, girlish stars go tumbling one after another into oblivion with relentless sequence. Marriage or concubinage is their only refuge. Even the greater stars must wane. One wife was suing her star husband for alimony. She said that he had been earning £2000 a week for six years, and *even now* was able to earn £600 a week.

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

One couple, feeling the hand of Time on them, consulted us. The husband was a popular director, the wife an equally popular star. Both had been favourites of the public for many years; among his many plays the director had staged at least one overwhelming success, and the wife had been able to retain her position exceptionally long for one of her beauty and fragile quality. Now they knew instinctively that the moment was approaching when retirement might threaten. Younger men with more elaborate theories of the moving-picture as art were damaging the director's position, for he was little more than a very capable story-teller. Younger women, who did not need the elaborate processes of the beauty- and the thinning-shops to keep their figures trim, women tuned to the more modern needs of the more modern directors, were undermining the star's popularity. If they must retire what could they retire to?

A superannuated director may become a supervisor, or he is in danger of becoming nothing. It is true that there is a downward slope on the far side of the peak of Hollywood fame; the fall is not necessarily precipitous. He might become a director of what is called there a 'quickie,' and produce cheap commercialized films rushed off by shoddy companies and outworn stars at cut-price contracts. But no proud man, once a leader in his industry, can deliberately welcome such an anticlimax.

So in one of those moments of depression when the future seems suddenly to show its teeth they asked us about Europe.

"For how much could a fellow and his wife live in Paris?"

"How much have you got?" we said.

"Well, if we sold this place and got together all our other stuff we might put up a hundred thousand dollars, more or less."

A hundred thousand dollars! After at least ten years of

## *Hollywood—The Stars*

fortune at incredible salaries they might be able to assemble just the sum that he had once earned in ten days.

“Twenty thousand pounds,” we said. “Why, properly invested that would give you enough to live very comfortably indeed in Paris, provided you were not too extravagant.”

“Invested! Hell!” retorted the director. “What should we know of investment and such things? We couldn’t invest our money; why, we’d just be swindled out of it. No; the best thing we could do would be to bank it and spend the stuff as long as it lasted.”

We looked round their magnificent hall; considered the rows of whisky-bottles on the sideboard—all of the best contraband; we thought of the great swimming bath in the grounds lit artificially from underneath by hidden electric light.

“It might last you about five years,” we answered. “And what afterwards?”

The director shrugged his shoulders, and grinned.

Another well-known character had his bathroom fittings made of solid gold; and when the plug was pulled a musical-box played loudly the “Wedding March” from *Lohengrin*.

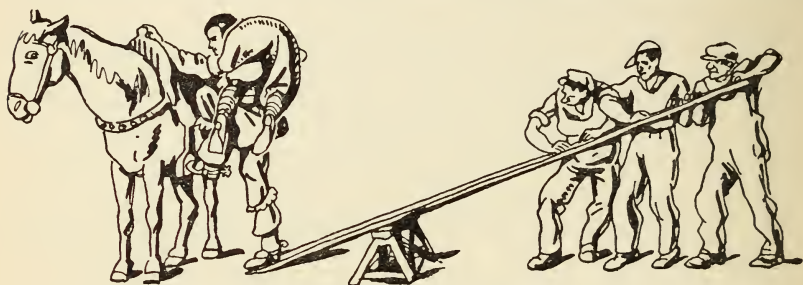
But this magnificence was mortgaged to the limit, and a few months later the owner was hunting Hollywood for the loan of a twenty-pound note.

. . . . .

Two of the nine masculine stars on our list were what we may call “amorous stimulants for the feminine fans,” types of male beauty with water-waved hair adored by the stenographers and work-girls of America, who may carry this adoration to the excesses witnessed after the death of Valentino—that is, even to suicide. One of these young stars received 38,000 letters from admirers and had to spend some £100 a month sending his signed photo to the multitudinous

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

admirers of his beauty. The lucky photographer who had taken this picture was able to live in comfort on the proceeds of this one photo alone. Greta Garbo, however, receives some 90,000 letters a month, 80 per cent. of which are from women. Two other stars were character-heroes, the one relying on his charm and agility, the other on his smooth cynicism. Another was the bluff type of hero, the American he-man, who reveals the tender side of his character in the last reel. The sixth was a comic hero. All of these six worked under



THE PASSING OF AGILITY

the constant threat of time. There is a character in a tale by Conan Doyle who continually calls out : " Youth will be served, my masters." The very lamp-posts of Hollywood often shout advertising matter through loud-speakers, but surely over every studio gate should be set a trumpet intoning this most pregnant sentence.

Already the famous agile star showed visible signs of Time's fatal advance. In normal dress he was fuller in the face than we had anticipated, and when made up for acting a close examination revealed a subtle reddish tint covering the area between the chin and the throat. This red was less photographic than the rest of the make-up and thus camouflaged the slight bulge which was already beginning to coarsen his profile. He was clearly not the man he had been ; the amazing feats of strength and skill which had so delighted

## Hollywood—The Stars

the audiences of the world were performed less easily. Once we watched him try to mount his horse with a comrade on his back. Another man would have used a dummy. Not he. Nevertheless the trick did not come off: he strained a muscle, and at last three workmen had to urge him upward, the camera, with nice adjustment, cutting off the long lever inserted under his lower foot.

If ever Los Angeles and Hollywood, lords of the Pacific coast, decide to erect a huge statue in rival of the Liberty of New York they could choose no better symbol than that of Old Father Time, with the legend: "*Eheu! fugaces labuntur anni!*"

. . . . .

The stellar system of Hollywood resembles its namesake: it can be resolved into a similar set of orders. There are fixed stars, with varying degrees of brightness; there are planets, which seem as bright, but whose illumination is borrowed; there are comets, swooping into the sun-arc's light only to vanish again; and there is the Milky Way. Behind and outside of these is the immense void.

But in Hollywood the proportions between fixed stars and planets is reversed. The fixed are few in number, but they shine by their own illumination. The planets revolve round the director, from whom they borrow most of their brilliance. We may call fixed stars such men as Emil Jannings, Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, Adolphe Menjou, Von Stroheim, and prominent comedians such as Keaton, Lloyd, Lupino Lane, etc. These men belong to the creative side of the films. They are at once inventors and interpreters. Their films express themselves and play to their personalities. These actors are not chosen by directors, nor do they bow to continuity-writers. They supervise and develop their own plays. Thus the work of such men (we are not offering an exhaustive list) has coherence. They are the central figures,

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

and by them the conglomeration which often results from the collaborations of author, continuity, gag-man, and director are fused together into a whole. Except when acting they are practically directors. Of these Von Sternberg could not have said :

“ Actors? The camera is my only actor.”

But the position of the planetary stars is very different. These revolve round the director. We have already sketched the portrait of such a star wondering where his next job was coming from. In truth the planetary star lives from film to film. Should his last film be a failure he may have to wait some time before he gets a new engagement. Or if no story is found that fits his scheduled character he may have to kick his heels until a suitable story is offered. Of course, the planetary stars vary much in degrees of luminosity. Some, although they have not the instinctive and creative genius that can make a Charlie or a Jannings, still become so popular and are so naturally pleasing that they remain in constant demand.

Nevertheless, for the planetary star the period of prosperity is not usually a very long one. Others are ready to oust them from their places in the firmament of Hollywood. Their peculiarities of temperament are often too continuously exploited, and the quick succession of their films, showing always the same personality, makes the public tire of them. They wane, and fade from sight and memory, like the actor already quoted whose wife was suing him for alimony. He was *still* capable, she said, of earning £600 a week. And for the privilege of being Jim Baily's ex-wife she was asking the courts to grant her a permanent annuity of £5000 a year. Under normal circumstances she would probably have been content enough, in a gingham overall and a mob-cap, washing the family dishes all the days of her life. From £2000 a week to £600, *facilis descensus*. The time cannot be long distant

## *Hollywood—The Stars*

when Mr Baily will find a difficulty in earning even £5000 a year for himself.

Making the roughest of guesses at figures, we may say that there are some thirty or forty magnates making perhaps £50,000 a year, with some four hundred principal stars at £20,000 and upward, one hundred supervisors at £20,000, three hundred directors at £10,000, five hundred experts, of varying degrees, at £50,000 and upward, and so on. Hollywood must represent the most concentrated gathering of *nouveaux riches* that the world has ever seen ; for most of these were people bred with expectations no better than of serving in a shop or in an office. Small wonder, then, that the sudden possession of this easily gathered wealth has caused a thousand joyless extravagances ! And small wonder that mad vanities and follies sweep the inhabitants of this colony ! To them Hollywood must seem the purse of Fortunatus, in which they expect to dip for ever.

For instance, one famous cowboy star was dazzled by the glamour of his own initials. They were wrought in iron on his fences and gates ; they were enamelled on the doors, stamped into the cushions of his car, and chased in the solid silver of his bits and stirrups. Malicious rumour whispered that they blossomed brightly in his flower-beds. The egomania that made him plaster his initials everywhere, and consider his work not only of national importance, but under the direct control of the Deity Himself, naturally results from wealth-induced superiority, the delusions excited by mimicry and the flattery of advertisement on characters unfortified by education or habit. He saw himself, not as he really was, but as the implacable two-gun man of his pictured existence.

We have spoken of the delusion induced by habitual mimicry. A hallucination of character followed one actor off the stage. A star, engaged in portraying the figure of Christ, as he came from the set was so inflated by his assumed *rôle*

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

that he half unconsciously blessed, with pontifical fingers, a row of children waiting to appear in the next act. Once we watched Adolphe Menjou playing a French count, and it was amusing to observe the gradual return of the actor to his normal and quite American self.

Stars may use their wealth to make a stage dream come true, sometimes with odd results. It is related of one well-known star, notorious for the magnificence of her film weddings, that she determined to warm her new house by staging in real life a wedding such as she had often graced on the screen. But at the moment, unluckily, she was married, and so was forced to content herself with the *rôle* of hostess. She searched among her friends for one in a fit state to be thus magnificently wedded. The only possible candidate was a young and already eminent film authoress who was living in free union with an almost equally well-known author. But the young lady, in spite of the many severe Acts of Congress specially designed to put a stop to such free American unions, was satisfied with her condition, and saw no cause to change it in order to give her star friend the opportunity of nuptial manifesto. She feared the result of legal ties on the affections of her, thus far, quite satisfactory lover. But as the gentleman had a leaning toward stricter bondage the lady bent to pressure. A sumptuous wedding-feast was prepared. Many times before the young couple had enjoyed the star's hospitality with a full recognition of their unlegalized union, but on this occasion she said :

“ I simply can't allow you two to share a room on the night before your wedding. I mean, it wouldn't be respectful. . . . ”

Perhaps the enforced solitude caused the prospective bride to reflect, or perhaps the panoply of white satin, train, and orange blossoms brought with them a keener realization.

The huge drawing-room was banked with flowers ; attendants in rich fancy dress stood marshalled in files ; the guests,

## *Hollywood—The Stars*

the clergyman, and the bridegroom were all breathless with expectation, but at the last moment the bride changed her mind. She declared that she would not be married at all, turned the bridesmaids out of the room, and locked the door.

Frantic appeals through the keyhole elicited no answer, not even the appeals of the bridegroom himself. But, in this emergency, the star showed some of the quality that had brought her to the forefront in the films. Returning to the drawing-room, she chose four of her most muscular guests.

"Go upstairs," she ordered; "break in her door, and carry her down. She has come to be married, and married she is going to be."

These haughty commands were obeyed. The door was forced. Screaming and kicking, the well-known authoress was carried by main force to the altar. The clergyman's reflections have not been recorded. We may expect that he was sufficiently overawed by the wealth about him, since even American clergymen do not escape the universal influence, or he may have been one of those who would legalize anything at any cost, one of those who would force America to be sober, chaste, and non-smoking by Acts of Congress and inquisitions of the police, and who might consider that any kind of a marriage, no matter how enforced, was better than permitting the girl to continue in a career of notorious sin. Though little conforming to the star's ideal of a grand film wedding, the ceremony was carried out. Seeing no means of escape, the girl consented to sign the register, and we understand that this marriage by capture has been rather more successful than are the majority of movie marriages. But we often felt that America was balancing a violent progress in some directions by an equally violent return to the primitive in others.

The stars are taken at the face-value by the humbler

## Star-dust in Hollywood

members of the film industry, those perennially hopeful aspirants and supernumerary actors called "extras." While sketching the production of Douglas Fairbanks' *Twenty Years After*, Jo overheard a conversation between two young supers. Their Middle Western accents accorded ill with their seventeenth-century French laces and velvets. Mary



DOUG

Pickford had just come in to watch the progress of her husband's film. Her sweetness exhausted their adjectives for a time, then they passed to a question which had evidently vexed Hollywood. In the last of Fairbanks' productions, *The Gaucho*, Miss Pickford had elected to act a tiny part, a vision of the Virgin Mary which appeared to the young hero.

"No," declared one girl decisively, "I always will hold, whatever you others may think, that Mary didn't really demean herself by taking that part."

"Well, I dunno," replied the other. "When you think of the kind of money that Mary usually gets!"

"Why," cried the other, "whatever are you talking about? Don't you know that Mary did that part for nothing?"

One other inflatus besides those of wealth, mimicry, and newspaper fame distends the star's self-esteem. Thousands of letters come from admirers each week demanding signed photographs. "My public," says the star, "demands this or that of me." The star sees, outside of Hollywood, a whole continent waiting eagerly for her next film, a public in the mind of which she has created an ideal, and an ideal that she

## Hollywood—The Stars

must not betray. Hence the muted struggle that we have depicted in Von Sternberg's *Docks of New York*.

The principal actors in that play hated their parts. For these parts threatened to lower their image in the eyes of their public. Miss Compson did not mind acting the part of an immoral woman; indeed, she rather specialized in prostitute parts, and one expert assured me that she had a positively adorable way of wagging her behind. But she did not like being exhibited as a wretched and unsuccessful prostitute. Bancroft did not mind being a brute, providing that he could reveal his heart of gold during the last reel, but he did object to being a dirty stoker without relief. However, in his next film he was a millionaire.

There is little or no Bohemianism in the real sense of the word. In Paris among the artists one realizes that when a painter becomes successful he slips out of Bohemianism as rapidly as he can. Few Continental artists were born in comfortable circumstances, and to them wealth and recognition by the wealthy *bourgeois* are the heights of romance. Bohemianism is used only to gild the pill of unavoidable poverty. Here the same conditions are the rule. Stars may fling their money about. They may indulge in wild extravagances and show, but they are not Bohemian. By Hollywood conventions they are conventional.

As we have already said, it is difficult to associate on a friendly footing with people earning £2000 a week, more especially if one owns an eight-year-old car, and lives in a bungalow court. We indeed offer but a worm's-eye view. But even from the worm's-eye view the excessive madness and the excessive badness of the place were open to doubt. Naturally there are both madness and badness. Excessive wealth and uncontrolled opportunity are bound to develop them. One magnate, we were told, had murdered a man too attentive to his woman. In several cases inconvenient

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

rivals have been kidnapped by masked men, and carried into the desert. There, in a shack fitted with the latest conveniences of modern surgery, masked doctors and nurses have carried out a slight but drastic operation common in the Moslem East, and thus the victims have been physically debarred from all possibilities of future competition. One such brutal elimination occurred during our stay. Naturally the author of the outrage was known to all concerned, but there was no chance of proving the crime against him. In fact, the victim could only say as little of the affair as possible and hope that in the future oblivion would erase from popular memory the sad results of his unlucky presumption.

Three important factors usually kept the stars in the comparatively narrow path : health, work, and the Black List. The task of creating a character by means of two-minute spasms, spasms often taken in a disconnected fashion, is far from easy. Added to this difficulty the physical strains are great. The arc-lamps concentrate heat as well as light, the actor or actress is often served up cooked as well as blinded. The floating particles of carbon discharged by the arc-lamps often settle in the eyes and cause a painful inflammation known as Kleig-eye.

Betty Compson told us that once she had to act for several successive nights in a tank of water which, as the heating apparatus had failed, was icy cold. But when the film was finished all her pains and risks of pneumonia went for nothing, as the whole scene was eliminated in the cutting-room.

In order to find new jobs, the stars must visit persistently all places where they can keep their faces and personalities before the directors and producers.

The star not only has to work all day, but has to cultivate relationships half the night. It seemed to us that the need of getting a new job dominated leisure almost to the exclusion of other interests. The parties to which we were invited were

## *Hollywood—The Stars*

neither very mad nor very bad. There was some flamboyant drinking and some almost conscientious getting drunk as though it were a patriotic duty—saving America from the claws of the Prohibitionists; that is the normal result of the Fourteenth Amendment on almost every circle of wealthier American life. But the general atmosphere of these parties was not infused with much care-free gaiety. They were markedly business gatherings.

A Christmas card sent to us by Betty Compson and her husband, Jimmy Cruze, shows many normal features of a Hollywood party. The card was hand-coloured, and measured some twenty-six by twenty inches. On it was drawn an opened section of their house on Christmas night. In the garden five



BETTY COMPSON

couples were enlaced in various stages of amorousness; one girl was chasing a man in full flight; one man was supporting another in the last stages of intoxication. Within the house the negro servants were stealing the boot-leg whisky and hiding it in a sack; ten men were applying themselves to the task of getting drunk; one, already successful in this quest, was falling into the fountain; two of the guests were stealing their host's whisky as a provision for the morrow; four authors had cornered a director and were trying to tell him their latest plots; one girl aspirant was running about with hands full of her own photographs, crying: "I want you all to look at my stills"; a man was trying to seduce a girl by promising to make her a star; a girl was

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

making the unlikely brag that she had just refused an important *rôle* from Cecil de Mille ; a man was trying to impress a woman with the statement that he gave Doug and Mary their first start in pictures. A girl was flinging her wet bathing-dress on to Betty Compson's bed ; another was 'phoning : " Sure send the whole party over ; I'm at Cruzes'." Two guests were complaining of the cooking, and another exclaimed : " Guests have rights." As far as we could see, no major element of the Hollywood party was missing except perhaps the portraits of two English authors being attacked by a long-winded gentleman who wanted to tell them exactly what was wrong with the movies.

This criticism on Hollywood by Hollywood itself contains the four principal elements of local entertainment : drink, sex, business, and egoism.

The cry " Guests have rights " is a part of a modern growth of egoism, marked by an inconsiderate grasping by the have-nots and a rather plaintive generosity of the haves. Admittedly the avowed creed of America is : " Don't save. Spend all you have and get more." All the copybook maxims have been dethroned, though possibly with the real intention of keeping the highly paid workman from amassing savings enough to organize effectual strikes. Debt, buying on the instalment system, the mortgaging of future income, and so on, effectually stop serious labour protests, for the man dare not go on strike who is eighteen months in debt and may lose the whole of his house, furniture, and even the clothes he stands up in, by missing one payment. So an orgy of spending is encouraged by the manufacturers, who gain at both ends.

But there is a limit to what one can spend on oneself, even with gold fittings to the bathroom, and the consequently lax generosity has developed a class of parasites. The rich are thus being placed in a position somewhat similar to that of





## *Hollywood—The Stars*

the old European aristocracy. They must have courts, dependents, sycophants, and pensioners. Only the manners have somewhat changed. In former days he who desired patronage had to approach his patron with respect and complaisance; to-day youth asks greedily and with an impertinent assurance. "Send the whole party over; I'm at Cruzes'." An introduction is almost an invitation to partake of the other's fortune as plentifully as one can grab, and those who win introductions grasp greedily with both hands, feeling little gratitude. "Guests have rights"—aye! and introductions have rights also.

One young artist told us:

"I had no money to go on with my training, so I got an introduction to old P——, and I went and told him: 'I got no more money left and I got to go to Europe for two years at least, and I want you to put up the dough for me.'"

Mr P—— bent to the rights of introduction, but the youth expressed no sense of gratitude. On the contrary, he seemed to see the whole incident in the light of a personal triumph.

"Say, while he was reflecting over it I sat there willing him like hell. 'You gotter come across with that dough,' I was thinking hard. 'You got to.' And I guess I willed him to do it harder than he willed not to, so I won."

Yes, as in the times of princes and grand dukes, the days of patronage have returned; but whereas in those times men of talent brought obsequious backs, and received patronage with subservience, nowadays youth considers the patronage as its right, repays it with a half-contemptuous nonchalance, or, should the largess be withheld, repays refusal with slander and scandal.

Undoubtedly the madness and badness were both subservient to the establishing of business relationships. Almost every one whom we met belonged either to those who might give or those who were eager to take. The latter could sum

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

us up as persons who had nothing to give; therefore they had little time to waste on us. The former, with whom we might make a momentary contact, even if not suspicious of our object, were almost always cut out and wrested from us by somebody who wanted something. There was a certain good-natured supervisor who tried to tell me what, in his opinion, was wrong with the movies, but he was never allowed to begin his exposition. As we have said, almost every job comes to an end at the finish of every film: directors, stars, minor stars, supers, camera-men, still-photographers, script-clerks, musicians, electricians, almost all are booked from one film to another. A running contract is a thing to boast of, a certificate of the very highest efficiency. Over most the dim image of 'no job' hangs as an indisputable menace some two months away.

But another menace keeps the madness within visible limits. The director or star who may have a contract is threatened by a clause that if evidence appears of an immoral life the contract can be automatically broken. This clause even comes into force if the contractor is involved in any scandal that might affect the box-office receipts. The unlucky one might then be placed on the Black List. Once on the Black List the victim's career can be considered as 'bust' until the authorities choose to relent.

But this weapon serves other purposes. A star who tries to exploit his popularity, and plays one studio against another in order to raise his price, may find that the whole market has suddenly closed down. Or a star who is domineering or who is litigious may also be ostracized. An actor who too consistently tries to seize the best positions before the camera and tries to juggle his *confrères* into inferior places may be put on the Black List for a time to teach him manners. The same fate threatens women who take advantage of their temperaments, who become hysterical on the sets under the director's

## Hollywood—The Stars

criticisms, or who use headaches whenever they desire an outing with a friend. Six months on the Black List has reduced many a neurotic star to very normal humanity.

"Yeah," we heard Mr Dick say once, "So-n-so is beginning to think he's about the biggest noise this lot can hold, 'cause he's got a booming contract. Thinks he can pull any stuff he likes. He simply don't know we can break him any day we want to, see? He's been living with a girl out at Beverly Hills, and he don't know that we're wise to it. When his time comes he won't have enough yap left to scare a Pekinese."

Rudolph Valentino himself was placed for a period on the Black List to make him properly humble.

. . . . .

Yet even a contract with submissive observance of the Purity Clause cannot ensure work for the stars. They have to be picked by a director or a supervisor and assigned to a film. A contract may assure a certain income, but it cannot assure the much more important thing, a regular appearance on the screen, which means the preservation of their public. For that they depend on personal contacts, parties, and the *premieres*, or first nights of important films, when the whole galaxy of Hollywood gathers at the movie house and when tall searchlights sweep the sky as if to announce the news to the distant and indifferent rivals in the profound blue overhead. Thus, the stars have not only to work during their days, but must give up their evenings to yet more strenuous shining.

To Hollywood a star more or less is a thing of little matter, even though she may be paid on a contract that gives her, say, £400 a month as a retainer. The victims or favourites are picked out by chance with an indifferent hand. It plucks half a dozen authors from New York, pays them £60 a week,

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

and at the end of six months may send them packing without having gained a single story. It spends £500 or £1000 on an experiment and tosses it aside; it risks a woman's life carelessly, and does not even use the piece of film that records the incident.

One evening we were invited to meet the great Mr Goldwyn at dinner. A young Viennese actress had also been invited by a kind-hearted patron, and the real importance of the dinner was to make a contact between the magnate and the star. For the star was in a cloud.

She had been noticed in Vienna by Mr Goldwyn's great rival, Mr Lasky. Enthusiastic about her work, the magnate had at once signed a contract for a year, a marvellous piece of luck; but, as she explained to us afterward:

"I think then it meant the fortune; Hollywood the centre of the film world. Mr Lasky the most important man in all the film world. I am now made for life. How Vienna envies me! Ah, what a send-off! I am going to Hollywood, to Hollywood, where gold flows like water. I come. They give me a fine house, they give me servants, a chauffeur and a car, a secretary; I live like a queen. . . . And for what? For nothing. I go to the studio. I see the directors: I say I have been engaged by the great Mr Lasky himself. But they answer coldly: 'We are sorry, mees, but we have no film in which we can use you at present.' Each time I go to the studio the same answer: 'There is no part at present.' Why, then, do they bring me over here? Why do they pay me this money? Give me this house? Is it just? Is it right? I have now been here six months—no part. They take me away from Vienna, where I was content, where I was known. How can I ever go back again? I could tell them exactly what has happened, but they will say: 'When she got to Hollywood they soon found her out. We thought she was good, but the Americans know better.' So they ruin me.

## Hollywood—The Stars

What can I do? In six months' time my contract is done. I am finished; after that . . . nothing. I shall have to marry one of your Americans and stay here, for over there I shall now be despised. . . ."

Yet we felt that she had little chance of melting the heart of Mr Goldwyn. He probably thought her fate lucky enough. If questioned he might have answered: "Well, I can't see what she has to grumble about. She's got a nice year's contract out of Lasky for doing nothing, and he's brought her over here to God's own California, where she can get a chance to marry some real he-American man. You'd think she'd be glad enough to get the chance, instead of grumbling and wanting to go back to that dug-out, lousy Europe again."

Besides, Sam Goldwyn had seen too many stars, rising, at their apogee, or falling. At Hollywood he played the part of *deus ex cinema machina*: "I make the stars."

We could see the hint of passion, the hidden fire of the girl, but it was European, controlled. American talent exhibits itself more positively; it is aware that it must sell itself, and has borrowed from the advertising-pages of *Liberty*. Moreover, Mr Goldwyn, like Mr Lasky, and the supervisors or directors, judged more by the husk than by the soul. Miss Wynne had provided herself with a trousseau before coming to this city of spot-lights, a trousseau that came from Fifth Avenue and was recognizably so. Everybody would first admire the Fifth Avenue trousseau, and from it proceed to admire Miss Wynne, who was inside. But the Viennese star seemed to have a slightly Teutonic taste in dress. Had she only halted a few days among the Parisian dressmakers, she would possibly have enchanted the Hollywood directors. In everyday life there was a hint of stuffiness about her clothes which effectually blinded the *blasé* eyes of whatever gods select the beauties for the camera.

The saying that there is room at the top is not always true.

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

The top is a platform of limited capacity, and the easier the job the more crowded the top becomes. This is especially true of the films. There are perhaps twenty-five or thirty principal studios; these studios are capable of producing so many films a month, which keep busy in turn so many cinema-halls throughout the world. Under the present system of supply and demand the number of these cinema theatres has become almost stable, and the demand for films has become practically stable in turn. The number of films that any studio can produce a month becomes stabilized also, and thus the number of employable stars is almost mathematically limited. There is no more room at the top, and as long as the old favourites can hold the interest of the public any new aspirant must be doubly brilliant to oust them from their places.

It is true, to complete the astronomical simile, that Hollywood has its comets. These are bright young girls who are able to use their eighteen years with a silver-gilt effect which tarnishes rapidly. Hollywood sucks their youth and throws away the husks as callously as ever the Minotaur devoured the maidens of Attica.

These eighteen-year-old comets dash into the radiance of the spot-lights, whirl there for a moment, and are spun out again into the void and darkness. They are of a non-periodic variety. Most are found lacking in the essential quality of unique personality which is essential to anyone who would hold for long a dominant position. Others, puffed up by their position, grow temperamental. Others step over the Purity Clause and become a danger to the Publicity Department. Others fall victims to bootleg whisky. Some marry.

The quality of vivid personality is naturally the most important asset of what we have called the fixed star. Chaplin, Jannings, Von Stroheim, Keaton, Fairbanks—each is unique in his own way. This shows vividly when a lesser actor attempts

## *Hollywood—The Stars*

to steal a bite from their popularity by trying to imitate them.

The quality of uniqueness is lacking from the planetary stars, no matter how eminent they may be for the moment. In spite of the apparently devastating catastrophe of Valentino's death, in spite of the suicides on his account, the films have not missed him. His pictures are not revived repeatedly, as are the films of Chaplin, Jannings, or Fairbanks. A dozen new beauty boys are ready to take his place. This is especially true when women stars are considered. Hardly one is sufficiently outstanding to leave a definite gap were she to disappear.

The film heroes and film heroines, the world's pictured lovers, are only types, they are seldom real characters. Among the men we have the brutal type, the dashing type, the Adonis, the picaresque, the country bumpkin, and so on; among the women there are the smart, the coquette, the siren, the coy, the simple, the girlish, the minx, etc.; all these can be substituted. If Miss X. is not available Miss Y. will do as well. What the movies cannot substitute is real character, and in the dramatization of this lies the supremacy of the better comic actors—Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd—and of the few who deliberately build up stories psychologically dependent upon and logically coherent with their physique, such as Jannings, Von Stroheim, and, in a more romantic and sentimentalized degree, Fairbanks.

The fixed stars, then, are characters; the planetary stars are types. Hollywood pays for character. This is further illustrated by descending a stage to the place where there really is room. Recently we noted an article stating that there was a marked dearth of men capable of earning £2000 a year. Magnates there were many, for given the opportunity it is easier to earn £5000 a year than £1000. One finds many a man who can earn up to £800, the hard-

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

earned reward of the careful subordinate; but those fit to take the step from careful subordinateship to a position needing vision are few. There is always room round the £2000 stage.

Allowing for the difference between London and Hollywood, there is always room in the films round the £3000-a-year position. The happiest man in Hollywood is the man



CHARACTER

important enough to have his name shown in the list of the cast but not important enough to have it on the hoardings. On the set he is sufficiently honoured to have a chair inscribed with his name, but it is a name that scarcely moves the outside world, nor does he need a special secretary to send off his photos to thousands of adoring flappers.

The Purity Clause and the Black List do not loom over his head; he must be extraordinarily naughty for the papers to be excited about him. This is the man or woman with character.

Beauties by the hundred serve in the drug-stores or wait in the restaurants hoping some day to catch a director's fancy, but a fine set of wrinkles can gain steady employment and suffer none of the temptations of over-advertised youth.

Of the nine stars whom we considered at page 151 three were superior and fixed stars: two actors and a waiter, but only one of these could be called a properly educated man. Three others were planetary stars: sailor, farmer, and acrobat, none well educated. The remaining three were the university professor, the Russian general, and the dancer. These also were stars, though of a secondary rank, but compared with

## *Hollywood—The Stars*

the planetary stars, who earned far higher incomes, they were fixed. Each of these men had character to sell, each was listed in the mind of the Hollywood 'casters' as unique for a certain part, and to such parts each gave an inimitable *cachet*. In fact, the university professor was climbing into a peculiar position where, as a secondary fixed star, he often outshone the major planetary star with whom he was cast. And yet he had little hope of becoming a superior and fixed star—at least, not until Hollywood's idea of what the public wants to see in the movies has changed almost as drastically as the idea of the popular short story in recent years.



WOLHEIM

## Chapter X

### HOLLYWOOD—THE ARTIST OF THE FILM

AT the dinner-party already mentioned the great Mr Goldwyn had an odd conversational gesture. He planted an elbow with a bang on the table, set his chin on his fist, and bent forward with decision.

He was clearly a man of one idea. To him the world was—the movies. Cataclysms might occur, Governments might change, bulls or bears might boost or break the market, but to him they were all cinematographical phenomena, things or people to be recorded on films, or people capable of paying to see things that were recorded on films. His only conversation with Jo was :

MR GOLDWYN. [*Bang.*] Mrs Gordon, so you went to Albania?

Jo. Yes, we went there about——

MR GOLDWYN. [*Bang.*] Have they any movies in Albania?

Jo. Well, in one small town they did have a projector. But as they had bought only half a dozen films and were too poor or ignorant to rent any more the people got tired of seeing always the same lot and said that the movies lacked variety.

MR GOLDWYN. [*Bang.*] Why didn't they turn them back to front?

Jo. I did hear of a black woman who took out a cinema to West Africa. She had a film of the life of Christ, but her operator wasn't very experienced and started it upside down. She refused to cut the film, insisted on running it through like that. The audience nearly wrecked the hall. . . .

MR GOLDWYN. [*Bang.*] Mrs Gordon, what I want to

## *Hollywood—The Artist of the Film*

know is : did you take a moving-picture camera with you to Albania?

Jo. No. You see our idea in travelling is to go with as little luggage as possible. When possible we only take our rucksacks. . . .

Mr Goldwyn, who could not imagine anybody travelling at all except for the purpose of arranging to have movies taken, to take them oneself, or to sell or hire out movie films, lost interest, and turned to his other neighbour, the deluded Viennese star. However, he kindly gave us introductions to the "United Artists," and by the usual stages we arrived at the Publicity Department, and by it were given the freedom of the place.

The United Artists was much freer and easier than the Paramount or the M.G.M. It was not dominated by a single management. Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, Samuel Goldwyn, D. W. Griffiths, Lubitsch, and others here pursued semi-independent courses with little in common except the use of the studios, workshops, the gymnasium called *Basilica Linea Abdominalis*, and the Artistic Department headed by a brilliant artist in his line, W. C. Menzies.

Probably the Publicity Department of the Paramount would have forbidden us to study this section of their activities. That stars and actors were illusionary they admitted, but then glamour can be built up round the fact that the salary of the illusion may be as much as £1000 a day. A thousand a day transforms a very ordinary person into a good imitation of a superman, for we are all prone to believe that anyone who can be paid so much is therefore intrinsically (not merely commercially) worth the money. We are content that the superman should stoop to create illusion.

So it might be also with the scenery. We should not quarrel emotionally with the medieval castle, though we might be aware of its falsity, if the castle had cost as much in

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

proportion to a normal castle as the star had cost in proportion to a normal man. If Publicity could advertise the huge costs of the scenery we should have found no obstacles in our path. But the incongruity of the fact that the £1000 hero has to clamber up the walls of a thirty-pound-six-and-eightpenny castle, built of lath and plaster, does give a shock that robs the £1000 of some of its natural magic. Furthermore, the castle-wall is seldom a castle-wall at all, but a piece of moulding laid at a small angle up which the expensive hero must crawl on his tummy, while, from above, the tilted cameras stare down at him. Under such circumstances the £1000 and the super-humanity almost fade into nothingness.

Yet that wall is not a haphazard thing. It was cast carefully by skilled workmen from a real piece of wall, for only a reproduction of actual stones and mortar will give a realism that can face the camera close-up. And behind the workshops, where the skilled men, powdered white with plaster-of-Paris, like millers with flour, would shape you anything from a medieval cathedral in miniature to a facsimile of the Colosseum full sized, was the artist's studio.

Although the movies are necessarily based on illusion, we can nevertheless admire the ingenuity, art, and invention employed in their construction, though the castle is but little more than lath and plaster, and the hero is in real life not much more of a hero. Yet as the latter must have a vividly dramatic personality and a power to simulate moments of intense emotion, so the castle may be the invention of a capable and often gifted artist. Indeed, the art of the movies sometimes demands that the imitation shall be more apparently natural than Nature herself.

One movie climax was the blowing up of an old hulk. The effect asked for was for something grim, mysterious, yet unhurried and impressive. The studio artist constructed a model, with the surprising sense of reality that is character-

## *Hollywood—The Artist of the Film*

istic of Hollywood, making elaborate models also of savages in canoes, palms, shaded shores, and so on. The cost of this miniature with explosion complete ran into some hundreds of pounds. With careful lighting the illusion to the artist's mind seemed complete, but the director remained unsatisfied. "Nature!" he cried. So, the hundreds thrown down the waste-pipe, the real hulk, at the expense of some thousands, was towed out to Santa Catalina Island, to be sunk in the face of Nature.

"Now," explained the director to the explosion contractors, "you must understand exactly how this sinking has to be. I want a fine dramatic explosion, and then the hulk has to sink slowly by the head, and at the last moment she must kick up her stern and take a long dive under the surface. Got that?"

I suppose by this time the experts had realized that it was little use arguing with directors; in Hollywood even Nature has to obey orders, even if the director seemed ignorant that wooden hulks, however shattered, do not sink dramatically by the head, such being the prerogative of the iron ship. A second obstacle in the way of carrying out his wishes was the Government regulation which ordered that every piece of sunken derelict had to be subsequently fished up and carted away, a job that would have made a fine gap in the contractor's profits.

However, the hulk was packed with explosives; the camera and arc-lights were focused on it; the signal was given, and



## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

the switch pressed. A terrific bang, a huge cloud of smoke which at once hid the hulk and rolled slowly over the water was the result. When this had cleared away not a fragment of the hulk remained. She had been blown to smithereens.

In this case Art had far outdistanced Nature.

. . . . .

If you think back over a movie play you will find that it is something like a suspension-bridge. It hangs together from a series of emotional high spots, and upon the strength of these high spots the continual interest of the whole drama depends. These high spots are not left to chance by directors, but must be designed with great care; not only as scenes of emotional importance, but as purely pictorial drama. For, in spite of the talkies, the true appeal of 'the pictures' is still in its pictures. In other words, a wide gap lies between the work on the scenario that we have already described and the turning of the camera on the stars. When writer, continuity, gag-man, director, and stars have finished with the script it is still only the written word. The actors do not act in a vacuum. The two chief stars and the director do not go wandering over Hollywood hand in hand from house to house looking for a spot suitable for a passionate embrace. No.

The man who has to invent, imitate, or even outdistance Nature needs not to be only an artist; he must be an architect, with a sure sense of the possibilities of construction and a knowledge of costs. He must be well versed in the arts of dodging, faking, and all kinds of trick photography. To such qualities he must add unfailing invention and a sense of the drama latent in pure pictorial effects.

The author has written, the continuity-man has hashed, the gag-man has interpolated, the director has reshaped, and the star has modified the text, but it is still a book full of type-

## *Hollywood—The Artist of the Film*

written pages, the mere caterpillar of the butterfly that shall emerge. Now the creatively visual mind must have its say. Of all the collaborators possibly only the director has any visual sense: he alone can see in his mind some dim image of what the picture is eventually to become. Yet again a very wide gap lies between a dim visual feeling and the actual concrete building that must first take place. Before one inch of the film can be turned the artist, with his more powerful visual capacity, has to ponder over the script and evolve the actual scenic backgrounds for the play. The difference between this dim image and the concrete is what divides the painter from the ordinary man. Try to visualize the face of your best friend. You may think that you can do this easily enough, yet try in your imagination to compare the simplest measurements. How long exactly is the nose in comparison with the forehead? You will soon understand that in fact this image is really very dim.

From the written script the artist has to conceive the drama as a series of visible happenings, but he has to conceive it so vividly that he can draw the scenes as though they really existed. The play as we see it starts actually in the artist's and the architect's office and in the construction-shops.

The director says to the artist: "We are going to open this play in a Viennese fair of the eighties." A fair is, after all, only a fair: a collection of merry-go-rounds, booths, cockshies, and so on. It has been used in the movies a hundred times already. What new in the pictorial sense can be got from a fair? It happens to be the artist's job to get something new out of the fair. If he cannot do this he is of little use in the movies.

He is the illustrator of the film. His designs have to be turned into good framing, plaster, and paint; sometimes on an enormous scale, sometimes on so small a scale that one can think only of the Queen's Doll's House for comparison, but

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

more often in a combination of the two, reality fading into miniature so subtly that it is quite impossible on the screen to perceive the junction between the two.

A movie play is not like a play in the theatre. It has no first, second, and third acts with appropriate set scenes and costumes. Let us take Ornitz's film played in and about a house in a Viennese suburb. Working through the scenario, the artist had to conceive the house of the director's dreams in its entirety. Then in the huge stage building he had to construct it. It had to be exact to Viennese models, for as likely as not the play would be shown in Vienna itself during its career. Recently a film representing Switzerland so caricatured the country that it was hooted from the movie houses there. The house must be furnished all through in proper style: drawing-room, dining-room, kitchen, cooking-pots, stairs, as in reality. And alongside there was the upper floor, plucked from its real position and laid on the ground. The artist had to imagine this house not only to make interesting photographic backgrounds from every possible angle, but also that these backgrounds should be emotionally suitable to the story. The photographers must be far enough away from the actors, the electricians must handle their huge lights in the rooms, and, lastly, not a foot more of the house than necessary must be built. The result stood open like a sad relic of the War stripped of its front by gunfire.

But whatever the house may be, it is not only a house; essentially it is also the husk of the drama. It is an assemblage of backgrounds. Every corner must be one that will assist the director in the development of his play. The communicating passages, the glimpses from room to room, from rooms to passage, up or down the stairs, and so on, must be thought out as things of pictorial value. Then they have to be fitted together as one coherent house. The artist behind



(1) *The House of the Crime*



(2) *The Pursuit*

ORIGINAL ARTIST'S SKETCHES FOR SETS

*Drawings by William Cameron Menzies*



## *Hollywood—The Artist of the Film*

the scenes must be able to see his scenery from more aspects than one.

If Ornitz invented three plots a year he would make quite a comfortable living, for even in Hollywood £4120 per annum will provide plenty of meat, vegetables, education, and bootleg. The artist may have to set two or more dramas a month. And every play demands an individual setting; new, original, and complete down to the smallest details. Not a door goes up that should not be studied in reference to the general tone of the piece, not a dress used that ought not to be considered in relation to the scenery.

And when the designing stretches beyond a mere house to whole villages or towns, land- or mountain-scapes, all invented, designed, and finally constructed within the limits of a movie lot, the real importance of the artist in the films can be estimated more correctly. Place your much-advertised hero and heroine before a blank backcloth and you might be surprised to find how much of the 'pep' had faded from their heroics.

William Cameron Menzies, chief designer at the United Artists studio, is a Scotsman. He gave us some of his original sketches, which we reproduce to explain with what skill and forethought the movie settings are planned. Although these are brilliant drawings, their function, as moments in drama, shows an even better understanding of using the moving-picture as dramatic art, and we must regret that often in the production of the films with which he has been associated the supposed needs of the story have prevented him from exercising his full artistic powers in the direction of more vivid picture-making. The number of directors who know the value of true pictorial art in the movies is yet limited. There is more work to be done in this line in spite of the chaos and confusion created by the sudden development of the movietone, with its very different problems.

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

Take this set of drawings for a convict film. They give a very good idea of how Menzies designs an emotional setting, and they show what a variety of devices he has at his command.

*No. 1: The House of the Crime.* The criminal is to come downstairs unaware that some one is sitting at the hall-table in the dim light of the reading-lamp. In this case the interest is almost equally divided between the two figures by the separate lighting schemes; it is intensified by the sloping line of the stairs and by the check pattern on the floor. The two different lightings separate the two actors from one another in an uncanny way, while a divided interest always gives a feeling of mystery; the slowly increasing size of the murderer as he comes forward down the stairs increases a sense of anxiety in the audience, and, at the same time, the dithery quality of the check linoleum is transmitted unconsciously to the man sitting under the lamp. Smooth off this linoleum to a uniform grey and half the actor's trepidation goes with it.

The effect of pattern on producing emotional results is further shown by *No. 2: The Pursuit.* The runaway passes out of the big door only as a silhouette. He disappears into the blackness, blots out the window for a moment, and reappears at last much smaller at the far end of the corridor, over which the telephone-wires and fire-escapes have already set up a series of agitated zigzags. The value of the black shadow in producing mystery is great; or try the experiment of covering the fire-escapes and telephone-wires. See how the drama diminishes.

*No. 3: The Prison Office.* Straight lines, and very few of them . . . no interest . . . doom and dreariness. The figures silhouetted against the light tend to lose their personality.

*No. 4: The Reception.* Convicts' faces in deep shade, personality obliterated, they are now no more than bodies in convict



(3) *The Prison Office*



(4) *The Reception*

ORIGINAL ARTIST'S SKETCHES FOR SETS

*Drawings by William Cameron Menzies*



## *Hollywood—The Artist of the Film*

stripes. The corridor skylights pointing to the figure framed in the square of light give it an uncanny importance in spite of its small size. He is coming out of the light to be turned into one of those headless, impersonal bodies.

. . . . .

The legitimate stage, as picture-making, can never hope to be more than a so-so business, for even if the stage compositions can be made perfect they can be perfect only from a certain number of central places. This disadvantage does not affect the cinema; its pictures are almost the same from every seat. Thus the artist can compose his pictures with deliberate art and composition.

A Sam Silberstein story relates that he was watching a film version of the battle of Waterloo.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "Who is the big man in this scene?"

"He is that man over there on the white horse, Mr Silberstein," was the answer.

"That feller!" cried the magnate. "But whatever made you pick a little chap like that? Why couldn't you get a real big man who would look important?"

In this he only reflects Sir Joshua Reynolds on the art of historical painting:

Alexander is said to have been of a low stature; a painter ought not so to represent him. Agesilaus was low, lame and mean of appearance; none of these defects ought to appear in a piece of which he is the hero. . . .

But the artist of the cinema has certain advantages over the historical painter: he can retain truth and yet give his heroes sufficient emphasis by means of lighting. But this calls out all his ingenuity for the invention of ever new devices to produce his effects.

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

On the stage the producer has but one background for a number of varying emotional scenes. Comedy and tragedy must follow one another in the same setting. But in the cinema an artist can fit his backgrounds to the moods of the piece as a musician fits his accompaniment to the melody. There has not yet been a sufficient amount of collaboration in this sort of production between the artist and the director. The latter is still apt to see the former only as a necessary visualizer between himself and the carpenters and plasterers who have to do the actual construction. The artist's hand is still cramped; in fact, Menzies himself told us that in many films most of his pet pictorial settings are either modified or cut out altogether.

Of course, many of the erections built for film production are really enormous. In the great hilly tract, several miles square, of the Universal lot stood an immense replica of the Paris Opera House, built for *The Phantom of the Opera*. In the galleries were numerous dummies that could be moved automatically. Lasky's owned the full-sized ocean-going liner, hired to any company for Hollywood sea-going purposes. Douglas Fairbanks for his *Twenty Years After* had built a reconstruction of the central hall at Saint-Germain, no mean feat of lath-and-plaster construction. In one of the United Artists studios was a replica of a Swiss church, perfect in all its details, but the outside of the same building stood ten miles away on the Universal lot on a piece of hill-side hired for the purpose, where a whole Swiss village, measured from actuality, had been erected in facsimile. Almost a square mile of this hill-side had been covered with more than two tons of artificial snow, made from china-clay and mica, while imitation mountain-ranges, immense screens of painted hoardings, had been set up all along the sky-line. But previously, during the summer, this same village had been transported to and erected in the Canadian Rockies, whither the whole

## *Hollywood—The Artist of the Film*

company had been carried 'on location.' The match-board mountains on the Universal lot were perfect reproductions of the Canadian prototypes and exact to scale.

Sometimes huge sums have been spent without reason. The immense profits that a successful film brings have



SWITZERLAND IN HOLLYWOOD

induced an almost equally lavish expense, for, in spite of the much-vaunted commercial organization of America, the movies have not been reduced to the status of financially sane propositions. A notorious case was that of a director whose fancy was caught by a pretty lake high up in the mountains. He determined to set part of a play at the spot. His opportunity occurred. At huge expense he transported the company—actors, electric plant, photographic plant, tents, and stores—many hundreds of miles to find at the end that the lake was dry. It filled only in the spring, and the

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

lake scenes had at last to be photographed with equal success on the Universal lot, where an artificial lake was quickly made at a hundredth part of the cost. During our stay in Hollywood this lake was serving a double purpose. A stout canvas screen divided it in two; on the one side of the screen was part of a show-boat on the Ohio river, while on the other side was an old galliot surrounded by icebergs.

One director determined to turn a great Roman film in Italy itself. He wasted a whole season and £18,000 in an endeavour to erect a replica of the Colosseum there, but finally had to return to Hollywood and build it there. What the Italian contractors could not put up in a year the local carpenters and plasterers built in six weeks.

. . . . .

Yes, the movie play is like a suspension-bridge—it hangs from its high spots. But between are a number of interludes in the chain of circumstances, and naturally the artist cannot take charge of every detail, although in a perfect film he ought to do so. Films are primarily commercial rather than artistic ventures. So to fill the spaces there are technical experts, costume experts, furniture men, and decorators.

The technical expert has often an uphill task if he is conscientious. One of our friends was an English officer who had to supervise the military rules and details of costume whenever the British Army was concerned, our censorship having shown itself quite pernickety over lapses in such matters, objecting to English officers appearing with uniforms half Americanized, or to privates dressed in what the French would term *fantaisie*. Yet even he could not persuade the actors in *The Four Feathers* to wear the correct uniforms of the Egyptian campaigns. They insisted on khaki, though khaki was not in general use until the Boer War. The actors

## *Hollywood—The Artist of the Film*

and staff protested that American audiences would not recognize English officers if they did not wear khaki.

A minor fixed star, formerly a Russian general, told us that once he had been appointed as technical expert on a film to be called *The Volga Boatmen*.

"They wanted to put it into the present day and make it a Bolshevik film," he said. "But I told them that Volga boatmen haven't existed for over fifty years. They got all the details and all the costumes wrong. Oh, absolutely. And because I really tried to get things right and tried to insist they paid me my money and turned me out. I tell you that the job of the technical expert is to say: 'Yes, that's all right; yes, that's all right'—whatever they do. We call them 'yes men,' over here, and that's about the truth, too."

On another film we met an earnest Frenchwoman, trying to supervise the manners of the French aristocracy.

"I've just managed to stop Menjou as a count from giving large cups of *café au lait* to his solicitors, who call on him at eleven in the morning. But I can't stop him from having a wedding in the drawing-room. I tell him that he must be married at the *mairie* and at the church, but he says that American audiences won't recognize a swell wedding if it isn't in a drawing-room."

On the sets of Fairbanks' *Twenty Years After* everybody, hearing that we came from Paris, said to us:

"Oh, this film is going to be a masterpiece. Why, we've got the best French expert on the costumes of the period to supervise it. We brought him specially from Paris."

Later we met a grizzled old Frenchman, showing in spite of his years the stiff vestiges of his military training, who sat in a labelled chair staring rather gloomily at the heterodox proceedings.

"I was in my Paris studio," he said, in a plaintive and puzzled voice, "and Monsieur Fairbank he come to me and

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

say : ' I want you to overlook my film in Hollywood.' I confess that I had little desire to displace myself, for, after all, at eighty-three one likes one's tranquillity. But Monsieur Fairbank, so charming and delightful, says : ' We must have you, monsieur. Take a week to think it over.' And he names to me a sum so large that it takes away my breath. So I come. But why they want me I cannot tell. I do nothing. I say this is not right, that is not right, but they answer : ' Yes, monsieur, but you see . . .' And then follow explanations. . . . Explanations. But explanations do not make things look correct for all that. Doubtless from their point of view they are right, but then why do they bring me over here in order that they may make explanations to me? They come very expensive, these explanations. I would do my work if I could, but I can't even make the ladies wear the right kind of shoes. And, after all, it was not for the money alone that I chose to displace myself so far at my age ; it was for the pleasure of seeing something really well done. ' Why spend all that money for nothing? ' I ask myself. And the same time I confess to you that in lending my name to this thing I feel somehow dishonest . . . if you understand me. Yes, a little dishonest."

There is an element of psychological puzzle in the continual efforts and lavish expenditure of Hollywood, efforts and expenditure out of all proportion to the financial profits that could possibly accrue from them. What makes them spend £60 a week on authors who produce no stories or whose stories, once produced, are forthwith degraded to the penny-novelette level of the communally commonplace subject? What makes them hire expensive technical directors and then ignore their advice? What makes them rush to the other ends of the earth, ignorant of local labour conditions?

The answer is related to a curious state of mind that also makes the Americans crowd to lectures and fills the libraries of Hollywood with authors whose pages are never even cut.

## *Hollywood—The Artist of the Film*

We knew an English professor who earned over a thousand pounds a year in New York by telling ladies about the contents of books that they ought to have read but had not the time to read. The book-clubs provided their bookshelves with the volumes that should be on show in any up-to-date household. These two were features of a new hypocrisy—the hypocrisy of culture. The travelling lecturer and the handshake is a variation of the same spirit. She who had heard an author lecture and had shaken hands with him was relieved of the necessity of reading his works, yet could still boast of him.

We can hardly picture the terrible stress imposed by the intellectual cult on the ordinary woman amid the rush of American life. She must be up-to-date in reading, but has hardly a moment to spare for books. This very superficial contact was the accepted substitute; for, since almost everybody went to the same lectures and belonged to the same book-clubs, there was little danger of their catching one another out.

The simple person who has shaken hands with a celebrity imagines herself to be a bigger, better, and more instructed person by the mere act. The film producers had a parallel instinctive feeling. A film that has, so to speak, shaken hands with the superior culture must be superior. "Story by Victor Hugo" is the handshake certificate.

No doubt also, as Mr Van Vechten suggests, some of the waste was due to an attempt to salve the conscience. There must be a dim feeling that huge salaries and huger profits demand at least an appearance of some higher aim than mere amusement. The movies bow lavishly to a semi-intellectual appearance, as the man who has just made a million by ruining smaller competitors gives lavishly to charity. The money spent thus in Hollywood is partly hush-money. The name is bought, and to most persons the name is the thing.

## Star-dust in Hollywood

And then there is the vanity of spending and the advertising value of mere price. We remember in England an old couple looking at a picture in a gallery. They liked it so much that they determined to buy it. But a few minutes later they came back shaking their heads. "If the painter is only asking that much," they said, "it can't be such a very good painting." A film over which a million has been wasted is bound to be a better film than one produced for five hundred thousand by careful management, and, from the point of publicity alone, a director who knows how to waste money is not always looked on as an incompetent, provided that his waste can be advertised as expenses of a cultural nature. In fact, propaganda for the films often reminded us of the Syrian bridegroom boasting of his bride:

"Beautiful? Of course she is beautiful: she weighs two hundred and fifty pounds."

"Good film? Of course it is good: it cost umpteen thousand dollars."

. . . . .

For the everyday parts of the film, or for films that are too everyday to demand the services of an expert artist, there are the studio decorators called respectively 'Streets,' 'Atmosphere,' and 'Bitchie.' Streets explains himself; he takes charge of all reconstructions of out-of-door life; he it is who supervises the change of, say, a *Bierhalle* section of Munich into a corner of Chinatown, San Francisco, with the least possible delay. Atmosphere is in charge of all character backgrounds, *cafés*, lodging-houses, foreign places, Indian villages, and so on. Bitchie is the expert of the sensuous; he looks after the details of boudoirs, drawing-rooms, bedrooms, and most of the intimate appurtenances of a properly conducted *liaison*.

. . . . .

## *Hollywood—The Artist of the Film*

Yet the artist's task in creating the gigantic needs little more than a pictorial imagination, accurate planning, careful detail work, and the expenditure of dollars. His work becomes far more difficult when, in the attempt to save money, the scene is not wholly realistic. That is, when the device of the miniature, or of condensed perspective, is employed.

In the Alpine village scene that we have already mentioned the mountains over the crest of the hill were no more than painted hoardings, although in the film itself it might have been impossible to distinguish these frauds from the photographs of the actual mountains themselves taken during the summer location. In fact, the movies have perverted that proverbial truth-teller, the camera, until it can lie like any trooper.

Behind the lot of the United Artists we found a strange piece of construction. A segment of a steamboat, from the funnel to the after-cabin, was being pushed to and from on rails by electric tractors. At its side travelled a large light stage, on which were grouped the cameras, arc-lamps, director with megaphone, and script-clerk. On the other side of the steamboat was a shallow tank some six inches in depth. It was perhaps thirty feet across, and its waters were silvered over with a coating of aluminium powder. On the far side of the tank was a backcloth fifteen feet high, against which had been built a line of miniature Parisian mansions, their five or six storeys being reduced to eight feet in height, while between them and the tank, that did duty as the river Seine, branches of trees were stuck to represent the shady water-side avenue. On the backcloth itself Notre-Dame was painted, though in an impossible position. Across the tank was the Pont Neuf, its full length compressed into thirty feet with impossibly grotesque effect. At the far end the bridge was perhaps four feet high, but its total perspective was telescoped into thirty feet. At the near end the half of a truncated

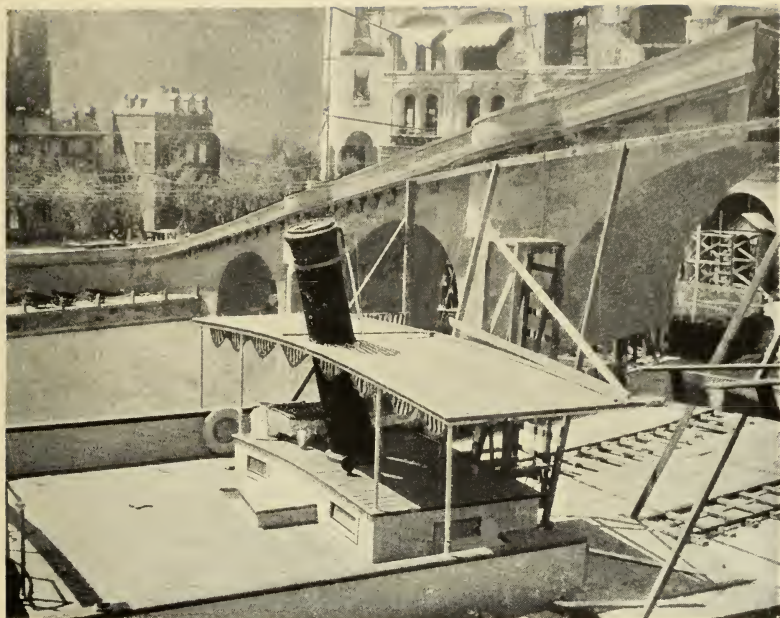
## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

arch stood twenty feet high and overtopped the funnel of the boat. Thus the whole of this scene, which was to represent moonlight and a steam-yacht on the Seine, was built within fifty yards of ground. At one end was a derelict Venetian palace, while at the other were the ruins of a Russian castle.

Above the back-scene three big arc-lamps were helping the sun to play its *rôle* of the moon; for here even the sun has to act and seem to be what it is not. In one view a number of curious objects were hung from an overhead railing so that they dangled close before the lenses as the cameras and boat moved along. These were small branches of a tiny-leaved shrub alternated with miniature lamp-posts, the lamp-posts so oddly distorted that they seemed the results of some Cubist painter's experiments rather than practical objects for use in movie scenery. This distortion was the result of their nearness to the lens and was corrective, for in the resultant photograph the cameras straightened out their odd eccentricities, and they appeared to be normal Parisian lamp-posts.

A violin wailed, a harp thrummed, and a 'cello grumbled as a passionate love drama was enacted on that odd segment of steamboat which groaned along under the impulse of its electric tractors, while behind us a clatter of cement-mixers and a forest of iron wire and wooden tubbing celebrated the hasty erection of the sound-proof movietone buildings. Possibly the Seine would next become a part of the Volga or a backwater in some Carolinian swamp.

Here two different effects were used in one scene. The small branches and miniature lamp-posts would appear as full-sized trees owing to their proximity to the lenses in comparison with the other objects, but the smallness of the far houses and the distorted perspective of the bridge would make the thirty-foot tank stretch out photographically as wide as the real Seine, for in judging distance the eye will estimate by size alone, provided there is no other factor for



### STEAMER ON THE SEINE

Compare miniature houses with real house behind.



## *Hollywood—The Artist of the Film*

reference. Size means distance. In a picture the big house is a house near by, and the small house is one far off. Thus the small houses at the far side of a thirty-foot tank will seem to be full-sized houses at ten or twenty times the distance. So dominant can this latter hallucination become that even if a corrective is suddenly applied the latter seems to be false.

In the actual filming of this scene a ludicrous incident occurred. Some of the window lights of the houses had failed, and a workman was sent over to remedy the defect. In a short time the error was put right, and at once the filming continued. But the electrician, ignorant that work had begun again, suddenly poked his head over the roofs of the houses and shouted out: "Is that all right?" The resulting photos had a curious effect, for the illusion of distance was so positive that the appearance of the electrician's head could not destroy it, but he himself took on illusion and seemed to be some gigantic intruder from another world.

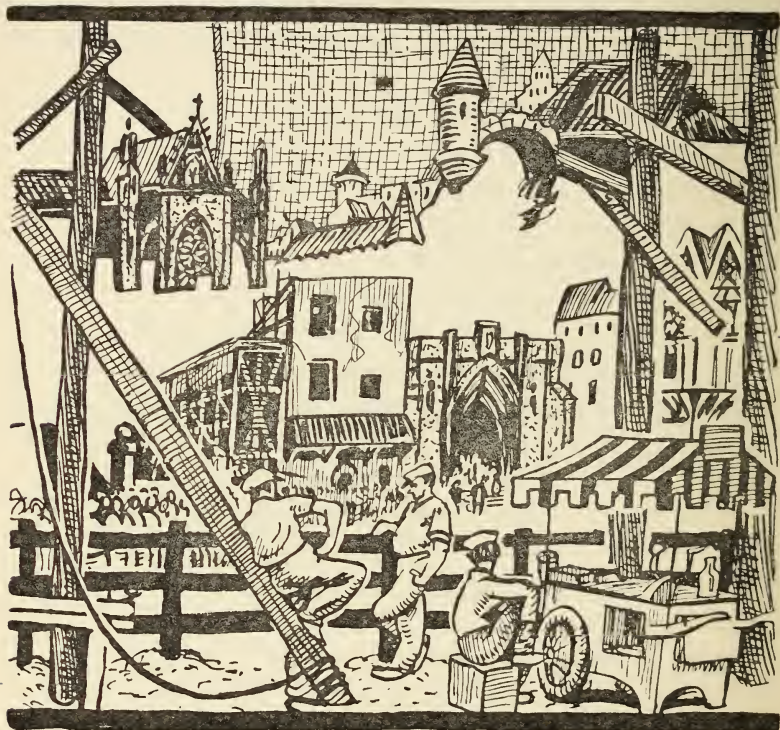
In Fairbanks' *Twenty Years After* were several uses of the miniature. In one scene the king and queen were watching from the balcony of their apartments a rush of patriotic citizens into the palace-yard.

The courtyard was merely a truncated line of buildings. The palace itself was only a tall tower of wooden lattice, on the top of which were two arches of the supposed balcony. Projecting from the top of the tower, from an overhead support in miniature, calculated exactly to scale, hung the top storeys of the buildings opposite. In a reconstruction of the Grande Place of Saint-Germain all the upper storeys of the buildings and the castle showing over the roofs were no more than miniature. These had to be calculated exactly to size, constructed with the greatest care, and then placed so that when the lens of the camera was set in a certain position and clamped there the miniatures seemed to fit exactly on to the

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

distant buildings. The camera joined them in a matrimony of optical illusion, deceiving the audience completely.

Another set represented a French village street. In this the houses, after a certain distance, were made smaller and



MINIATURE UPPER STOREYS

The camera is some way to our left, and so placed that the upper part of the church exactly fits on to its portal. The supporting fabric is non-photographic. Note the ice-cream cart in a medieval setting.

smaller, with a really ludicrous effect in real life, but one impossible to draw, since the pencil itself was defeated by the illusion of genuine perspective. Again, while trying to find a good spot from which to draw the ceremony of christening the royal babe by Cardinal Richelieu, over my head I noticed a flat, dark square, elaborately carved, apparently represent-

## *Hollywood—The Artist of the Film*

ing a ceiling. At the moment I could not imagine its use. However, in stepping back I stumbled over a big hook screwed into the floor, and, while rising from my fall, by chance my head came into the exact position that the camera was intended to occupy. In a flash the tiny ceiling had stepped on to the huge and distant hall in which the ceremony was taking place. The room was completed. To photograph so large a gathering a number of powerful lights are imperative. Batteries of square-faced scoops glared down from above, and huge grids of mercury lamps hung overhead. There was no chance of putting any actual ceiling on the hall. But, with the camera fixed at exactly this spot, and securely clamped to the big hook, the miniature fitted the walls of its distant parent, and the impression of a completely closed hall was perfect. However, a ceiling at ten yards and a hall at fifty from the camera do not follow exactly the same laws of optical perspective, so that the artist has, in addition to his other gifts, to be both mathematician and optician.

Under-water scenes, like the one on the Metro-Goldwyn lot described in Chapter XI, are quite dry, but are photographed through thin tanks of gently moving water. In *The Black Pirate* a band of men had to swim under water in perfect formation. The men were placed in position on their stomachs ; they then went through the motions of swimming while the camera, looking down on them vertically through a thin tank of water, was moved backward in the opposite direction. When this was reproduced on the fixed screen it gave the complete illusion that the men were swimming forward. In *The Thief of Bagdad* Fairbanks rode Pegasus into the clouds. This was a dangerous feat. The horse had to gallop up a narrow incline covered with black velvet, a material that, absorbing the light, does not photograph and thus seems invisible. The animal was gradually trained under the dazzling glare of the arc-lamps. A single slip on that narrow path

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

might have meant death for the actor, but the gay quality of courage that Fairbanks produces so well in his films is really a quality of the man himself.

In some films the risk is less than it seems to be. In Los Angeles is a street of houses set on the edge of a cliff under which passes a tramway tunnel. Immediately below is a street with tall houses and all the traffic of a busy town. So, by a proper adjustment of the camera, an actor may seem to be hanging hundreds of feet above the pavement, while he is dangling no more than one storey from the ground. On the other hand, there are human flies and daredevils who are ready to risk their lives for comparatively small sums. Lions, guaranteed harmless, are supplied by the 'lion farm,' which breeds lions like puppies. However, even harmless lions occasionally revolt, and while we were in Los Angeles a class of growing lions suddenly uprose and, in a climax of furious protest, fatally injured their schoolmaster.

Large propellers, like those of aeroplane engines, provide any wind desired, from mere zephyrs to cyclones; or, combined with the hose, will imitate any kind of weather, from a gentle summer shower to the devastating waterspout.

## Chapter XI

### HOLLYWOOD—ACTING ON THE FILM

ONE Sunday evening we played our Spanish folk-music on the laud and guitar at the house of James Cruze, director of *The Covered Wagon* and *The Great Gabbo*, and many other successful productions. Cruze and his wife, better known as Betty Compson, kept open house, an easy hospitality that welcomed great and small with a breezy, democratic sense which still lingers sweetly in some American natures. It was, indeed, one of the few houses of the Movie Great into which we penetrated undisturbed by a subtle feeling that we were being accepted rather as poor relations from the country. The guests were divided naturally into the four groups already shown on the Cruzes' Christmas card. Some were taking advantage of the unlimited whisky and ginger-ale, others were on the love quest; the small were hunting the great, and the great dodging the small.

After having been greeted by our hosts, and having been provided with large doses of hooch, we stood on one side as observers, for nothing is more self-centred than a large community interested in and living upon one central industry, and the provincialism is doubly marked if the industry touches the arts. For the toppers and the amorous we had little interest. The great were unknown to us, for their names, however eminent in Hollywood, had not always spread to the outside world, except among their particular fans. Our ignorance of their fame tended to chill them. The small found little profit in us, and even if we did manage to corner one in conversation we usually noticed a wandering look in his eye, which was probably focused just over our shoulder,

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

watching the occupation of some more useful quarry. One of the most detached persons was the assistant governor of a local gaol, but he refused to be drawn beyond giving us a general invitation to visit his 'show' any time we liked.

For a moment our playing created excitement. Temperamental people ran about banging tables. Lovely stars embraced us enthusiastically. Americans respond easily to

strange rhythms. A whirlwind enthusiast offered me two thousand pounds if I would teach him to play the guitar as I did in six months.

He waved a cheque-book at me and became angry at my refusal.

"But why don't you?" urged Betty. "He is so rich that two thousand pounds don't mean anything to him."



THE WOULD-BE PUPIL

Unluckily the capacity for playing an instrument is not a purchasable commodity. But, apart from this man who really hoped to draw profit from us, the only other person showing rather more than transitory interest in the music or the instruments was a director who bewailed the fact that his wife was not present. "She might be cured of her love for the ukelele by hearing real instruments," he said. "My last transatlantic trip was spent in stealing all the beastly ukeleles and dropping them overboard, no matter whom they belonged to."

Otherwise a numbing indifference to anything beyond the small talk of the movie world kept us at arm's-length from most of the guests.

## *Hollywood—Acting on the Film*

However, on the following morning we received a telephone message :

“This is Mr Cruze’s secretary speaking. He wants to know if you would play your instruments in a scene for his present film. . . . All right, come down to the studios to-morrow.”

The Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios were ten miles away from Hollywood, at Culver City, where half a dozen of the more important movie lots were concentrated. The M.G.M. had an immense lot clustering round the characteristic water-tower and showing to the road a broad Corinthian front, with tall Greek colonnades under which Plato himself might have walked, contrasting oddly with the factory-like interior, out of which large, lumbering lorries loaded with strange apparatus were passing into the road.

On this occasion we came in by no clattering or buzzing visitors’ door, but went to the artists’ entrance at the side and there lined up with a few dozens of our kind. We spoke our names through a pigeon-hole and were given tickets to the wardrobe-keepers.

Within we saw little of the decorative quality that characterized the Paramount. The Corinthian front had no false photographic back nor decorative garden with fountain ; no architectural fantasies diversified the façades of the stars’ dressing-rooms.

Jo and I at once parted company, she to the women’s, I to the men’s wardrobe.

A long counter stretched down the room. Men of all kinds, from smart young American lads, their hair carefully set in artificial permanent waves, to rough Mexican hobos from the slums, thrust forward tickets and clamoured for costumes. Behind the counter a number of broad posts were placed, just distant enough from one another for a man to pass between and from the back of the posts to the depths

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

of the room. Serried rows of clothes on hangers filled all the available space and made a series of narrow corridors, through which three or four wardrobe-men were scurrying with arms full of costumes, which they flung on to the counter. Even the fronts of the posts themselves were hung thickly with properties that might come in useful. I had no desire to thrust myself into the rush of the habitual extras, and, taking out my notebook, made a list of the hotch-potch articles hanging there :

Necklaces of teeth, a crown of thorns, tambourines, crutches for a dwarf, a Russian bride's head-dress, a wooden arm, police helmets, and hats of various nations, horses' nose-protectors, Scots caps, a skull, a sceptre, swords, firemen's helmets, serious and comic, lictors' bundles, Hawaiian garlands, a trident, Mexican hats, and other properties almost as incongruous.

At last the crowd thinned off, and I showed my ticket.

"Oh, yeah," said the man. "Mr Gordon. Yeah, Mr Cruze's ass't'nt tol' me 'bout you. Gipsy fake is what you want, see? You'll be a purty big size too."

He measured me with his eye and picked out a shirt, a pair of trousers, and a couple of handkerchiefs.

"That'll fix you up all right," he said. "Now I keep this here ticket, see? You bring back your clothes, 'n' I give you back your ticket, see, 'n' then you can get your pay. Now you go and look for Harry 'n' tell him he's got to give you a special's room, see? Then when you're dressed up you go and find the make-up man. . . ."

His instructions led me to the man Harry, but did not lead me to a special's room. Harry was a wispy-looking fellow with a permanently plaintive face.

"Gee!" he almost wailed as he ogled my ticket. "You're another of them. I'm sure I don't know where I can put you. Why, all the specials is three an' four in a room at this

## *Hollywood—Acting on the Film*

moment. 'N' some is too special, I can't put nobody in on them."

As if to guarantee the truthfulness of his plaint he led me to the specials' dressing-rooms, a two-storey box, white-washed, with an outside stair and a balcony. He showed me into a corridor and knocking at a door opened it. The concentrated atmosphere of undressing man steamed out burdened with some impolite queries. Another door gave a like result. Quite clearly there was no room for me among the specials.

"Honest, you'll do better in the extras' room," said Harry. "Of course, a regular special mightn't care to go there, but perhaps for you it'll do just as well."

He led the way to the extras' room, a long barn, the centre of which was filled with green-painted lockers.

"You can shut up your stuff here," said he. "Honest, it'll be just as safe."

He breathed a sigh at my ready consent. Already the mob of expert extras had got into their clothes and had quitted the building, leaving behind them no more than their floating aroma. Only two were still half-clad, waiters with shirt-fronts and collars of light pink, a colour that strikes the sensitive film less brutally than a blaring white.

I quickly put on my gipsy clothes. The wardrobe-man's eye was skilled with long practice. Indeed, I had



SPECIAL LANGUAGE

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

already seen him at a glance fit men with straw hats or with boots.

Dressed as a gipsy, guitar under arm, I returned to the maze of buildings. Here was the Stenographic Department of the Metro-Goldwyn. Through the windows poured a clatter as though inside were thousands of monkeys cracking nuts. They were but the typewriters of fifty authors trying to crack out stories. A long row of sheds housed odd sidelines of the movie business, including the make-up man, who had a superior kind of barber's shop and was himself dressed in a long white smock.

"You won't need much," he said to me. "With these new panchromatic films, we don't have to do a lot to faces, except for character parts."

The walls were decorated with a number of photographs, which I took to be specimens of his art, but they were really specimens of himself. Later, to Jo, he was a little more communicative.

"Those are all me," he said to her. "You see, I'm an actor really. But making up folks as a regular job pays a darn' sight better than getting a good job in the films now and then. That don't pay at all."

As she left he gave her a large card with pictures of himself in a dozen different characters circled round his name, also a tinted picture of himself as a Guido Reni Christ, with a golden halo. He had been understudy for Warner in *The King of Kings*.

Behind the groups of office and technical buildings were the big stages like aeroplane sheds. At the doors of some, taking the air, lounged extras in picturesque groups: Mexican *rancheros*, in velvet with mother-of-pearl buttons, or Spanish gentlemen of 1880 in tightly fitted black and pink or yellow photographic linen, Austrian officers and soldiers, early American settlers, Indians—nothing could be

## *Hollywood—Acting on the Film*

too incongruous to be found there somewhere or some time. A burly, blue-jowled man passed leading by the hand a chimpanzee, just arrived to earn a goodly sum for its trainer.

I had been directed to one of the farthest stages on the lot. It stood at the edge of the land used for temporary buildings, which were crammed on it cheek by jowl with a fine disrespect for congruity. A set of Chinese buildings nestled back to back with a medieval castle, in the courtyard of which was an Italian gipsy caravan. Behind the castle were grouped a few Indian wigwams. Beyond there was a scene under the sea. Huge seaweeds made of painted canvas stood streaming upward into the air sprouting from rocks of plaster; at the side were pivoted barrels on which were stuck broken pieces of looking-glass, the turning of which under the glitter of the arc-lamps caused wandering gleams, as if of sunlight, piercing through the water; at the back was the camera stage with a thin tank for water through which the scene could be photographed, the only water in the whole aqueous set. A motor-lorry came down a French village street piled high with a number of Malay canoes, and from a withered oak-tree, with a cement trunk but real branches, dangled a *papier-mâché* corpse.

Naturally all this varied material did not present itself at once. But as the stage remained empty I explored a little in the intervals of waiting. At last, however, a workman told me that Cruze was 'shooting' on another stage, and hurrying there I met my own name echoing through the gloomy spaces of the roof.

We had been cast as fake gypsies at a Hollywood evening-party in a dining-room which was almost a facsimile of one in the director's own house. We had to sit on the floor and play Spanish music while the guests dined and drank luxuriously. No false film food this, but succulent dishes that served many an extra that day in lieu of lunch.

## Star-dust in Hollywood

The whistle blew ; the batteries of lights concentrated on us, almost searing our eyes.

"Music !" shouted Cruze.

We began to beat out the rhythm of a jota, but the orchestra which here substituted the ordinary harmonium, violin, and 'cello burst into a raucous jazz, drowning our instruments.



JIM CRUZE

"Gosh !" shouted Cruze to the conductor. "You don't have to play with them."

Jo poked me with an urgent elbow :

"You've forgotten to take your glasses off."

I slipped them into my pocket.

"Cameras !" shouted Cruze, and as we played the handles whirled vigorously in *tempo*.

"Cut !" shouted Cruze.

Then the still-photographer with his big studio camera focused us. Meanwhile, as the

cinema cameras moved to a different position, I slipped on my glasses again.

"Play some more," the guests urged us.

We gave them a sardana, an exciting dance from Barcelona. So immersed did we become in the music that we failed to notice the whistle, and played unconscious that the cameras were once more grinding at us until the second whistle blew, the big arcs gulped with an orange flicker and turned suddenly grey. I had retained my spectacles all through the scene. A longer blast on the whistle announced lunch-time.

The last shot had been a distant one, and I comforted myself with a recently heard episode in the filming of Fairbanks'

## *Hollywood—Acting on the Film*

*Gaucha*. One scene contained a long miniature background of a distant mountain. This had been designed to scale, and, although actually some ten feet high, would appear, in the subsequent picture, indistinguishable from the real Andes. At the end of a crowded day, with hundreds of extras, the whole act costing perhaps a thousand pounds, the director noticed that one of the red-and-yellow umbrellas used for shading the cameras had been left in the middle of the miniature distance. At that moment the language used would have provided a fine set of pure vernacular expressions for any collector of Americana. Luckily when the film had been developed the umbrella showed an unexpected power of camouflage. It was not necessary to film the act again, but the initiated may be able to find in a certain section of *The Gaucha* a monstrous umbrella perched on an apparently inaccessible cliff of the Andes. If so large a thing as an umbrella could disappear I might hope for my spectacles. At a subsequent meeting Cruze made no reference to them, not even when he gave us the still-photograph recording our day's acting.

"I'll show you the way to the restaurant," said a small voice at our elbow. "Surely you remember me last Sunday at Cruzes'?"

We recognized one of the guests, a young girl with hair like silver-gilt. She was dressed in an expensive evening-frock.

As usual in the restaurant, all the costumes of the world rubbed elbows, while the wistful waitresses served the pageant they were not clever enough to participate in.

"Once," our silver-gilt friend assured us, "I had quite good parts. I was nearly a star, but now I'm too old."

"Too old!" we exclaimed, for she seemed to be quite a girl.

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

"I'd have you know I'm twenty-four," she said. "And that's old for a fluffy little thing like me. Yes, I had real good parts when I was seventeen or eighteen. And I thought to myself: 'I'm going right to the top.' But I soon learned. This is where they teach you where you get off, and nothing charged for the lesson either. Still, I think we Americans learn to take things philosophically. It doesn't matter to me so much. I just do this now to amuse myself and to pay for my smart frocks. You see I'm married, and we'd be real well off if my husband's oil-well would only pay. . . ."

"But an oil-well," we cried; "doesn't that mean a fortune?"

"So they tell you in the story-books," she said. "But things are often different in real life, aren't they? You see, there's too much oil at present. All the tanks and all the storages are full. But oil isn't like coal. It runs. I mean, if we've got a well here and somebody else's got a well there and there's another well there, we are all pumping out of the same underground tank, so to speak. If my husband didn't pump, why, then his neighbours would pump his share as well. So we have to pump and pump, and it just pays expenses, that's all. And there's lots of folks who think: 'If only I had an oil-well!' I tell you it makes me cry sometimes to see all that money running away."

"But couldn't all the wells in one plot combine to stop pumping till the times are better?"

"Of course we could," said Silver-gilt. "But my husband says: 'It is like war.' Nobody will stop first."

We returned to the stage. We had finished our turn, but we had to stay till the day was over. Here and there on rough benches extras were whiling the time away with bridge; in a level corner some couples were dancing when the band played. In another corner a young man in a dress-

## *Hollywood—Acting on the Film*

suit with a yellow shirt-front and cuffs was modelling a small copy of the *Discobolus*, that *Discobolus* which so shocked Canadian morals in the days of Samuel Butler; "O God, O Montreal." Jo spoke to him and found that his ambition was to become a sculptor.

"I work like this whenever I get the chance," he told her. "I'd go to the evening classes if I could, but a chap like me has to be at parties pretty nearly every night. I've got to keep in contact with the big guys. That's the only way I can get jobs. Otherwise I'd be listed with the twenty thousand other extras at the central casting-bureau, and if I got one day's work a month I'd be lucky. You just have to be seen all the time, and that takes up your evenings."

On a garden-bench a row of old and seemingly aristocratic gentlemen dozed away the afternoon. The ruck of Hollywood actors, even the stars, spend the greater part of their time waiting like this. Ten minutes' work out of a seven- or eight-hour day is a good average. The rest of the time is spent in comparative mental vacuity, playing cards, or gossiping. The young sculptor was a bright exception. Very few read books. Small wonder then that the wits of Hollywood are dulled and unresponsive!

. . . . .

No greater contrast could be imagined than the difference between Cruze's directing and that of Von Sternberg. Meticulous artistry did not interest Cruze; he was concerned with the task of telling the story as vividly as possible and of getting the work done as rapidly as good picture-making would permit. The difference was like that between a lusty scene-painter slashing on his effects with a broad brush and a Pre-Raphaelite slowly building up his effects by an accumulation of carefully considered detail. But, to

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

balance the careful artistry of Von Sternberg, Cruze had the greater vitality. He lent himself to his actors, and seemed to infuse them with his own easy good nature, which made the acting go with a swing and formed a unity between the director and the actors. With Von Sternberg, on the other hand, rather critical and contemptuous of his puppets, the actors often seemed like puppets indeed, and he had to spend his extra vitality in using more convincing realism and artistry in the picture-making. In terms of art criticism, Cruze might be called the Romantic director and Von Sternberg the Neo-Classic.

At last we could return to our dressing-rooms, far more exhausted by the long afternoon's wait than by the morning's work. I took back my clothes, received my pay-ticket, and joined Jo in a line before the office. There Silver-gilt came up to us.

"Let me see what you've got on your tickets," she said. "'Talent specials.' That'll be a lot more money than I draw. I get seven dollars because I have a nice dress, but the time was when I was getting a hundred dollars a day. Those tickets of yours should mean real money."

Just in front of us in the line were other talent specials, three dwarfs, whose talents consisted in little more than accidents to the glandular system. We had been rather curious to know if the chimpanzee would be one of us as a talent special, but probably he was a star. For our ten minutes' of work we drew £5 apiece. Well satisfied, we sought out our old car and drove home. On the way Jo told me of her experiences in the women's dressing-room :

"My wardrobe was an eerie kind of a place. Everything hung from the ceiling. You walked under thousands of costumes, from an English policewoman's uniform to a Hawaiian grass skirt. And for some reason there were masks stuck up all round. When I arrived only an Egyptian princess

## *Hollywood—Acting on the Film*

was there, wearing high-heeled shoes. She was shouting: 'Mother, Mother!' Suddenly a side door opened—into



THE WOMEN'S WARDROBE-ROOM

another room where more costumes were hanging like Bluebeard's wives—and out bustled a fat, rollicking old woman.

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

“‘Say!’ called out the Egyptian to her. ‘I got to have some shoes quick. I can’t go on the set like this.’

“Unperturbed she handed the girl a pair of sandals and then hunted me out the gipsy costume.

“‘Now you put that on,’ she said firmly. ‘That’s what’s ordered for you.’

“As soon as I had undressed she seized my clothes and stuffed them into a bag, which she took away. By the time she had come back I was already dressed as the gipsy. I patted myself down and told her we had bought stuff just like the skirt in the Balkans. You know. The stuff we upholstered that chair with.

“Mother’s manner altered at once.

“‘Well, that’s all right,’ she said heartily. ‘Now, a nice fuss I’d have had with most girls over that dress. “Want to make me into a bunchy old frump,” they’d have said. Fussy. All wanting to be as skinny as bean-poles even if it ain’t in the part. I tell you why these girls don’t get on. They don’t want to act—they want to come out pretty. Bean-poles, that’s what it is. Why, they looks at me as if I hadn’t no right to be alive, as if I ought to be made two of. Well, I’m satisfied with myself as I am, thank you.’

“‘You’re like Mr Weller,’ I said to her. ‘As you gets vider you gets visier.’

“Then I told her about African brides and how the Syrians adore fatness.

“‘Well, you *have* travelled some,’ cried her assistant, a younger woman. ‘Now, I just adore to travel. I’m not going to stay here much longer, I’m not. Do you know what I’m going to do? I’ve gone and signed on with a Barnum’s circus. I shan’t get the salary that I get here, but, bless you! I can’t stay in one place all the time, I can’t. I just got to see some life. . . .’”

## Chapter XII

### HOLLYWOOD—THE COMIC FILM

A FRIEND, intent on gain, once took a travelling-cinema plant to West Africa. He wanted to set up a cinema near the desert's edge at a town from which the caravans started toward Timbuctoo. He hoped to reap a small fortune by the enterprise, for here was a real example of the mountain coming to Mahomet. The ordinary cinema theatre, as the Albanian promoters had found to their loss, must continually change its films or audiences will fade away. This entails no small expense. But at this town a full half of the population changed every month, collecting gradually to join the caravans and emptying as soon as the caravans set out. So, instead of the owner having to bring new films to the audiences, Nature contrived to bring new audiences to the films.

That he never reached his destination is part of a longer story, but on the road he naturally tried to minimize expenses by showing as he moved. Thus, landing at Lagos he hired a huge courtyard with a balcony, open to the skies of heaven. This was by no means the first movie enterprise to delight the black population of Lagos, for he had two rivals. One was a Portuguese half-breed who tried to poison the new competitor, but dosed the wrong man; the other was the negro woman, she who insisted on running the life of Christ upside down rather than cut her film. In our friend's *répertoire* was a film that drew all custom from the others: a picture by Charlie Chaplin.

On the day of his opening enthusiasm ran high. Black sandwich-men dressed as Charlies paraded the town. The

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

courtyard and balcony were packed to suffocation. The hilarity of the performance was interrupted by a sudden crash and howls from outside, quickly followed by the urgent ringing of an ambulance-bell. Our friend extricated himself from the box office and ran into the street. A tall palm-tree grew close to the walls of the compound, and up its forty feet of slender trunk a Charlie enthusiast had swarmed, congratulating himself on a free seat. In spite of this insecure perch, the glamour of Charlie had made him forget his position, and, letting go his hold in an ecstasy of delight, he overbalanced and fell, breaking both arms and several ribs.



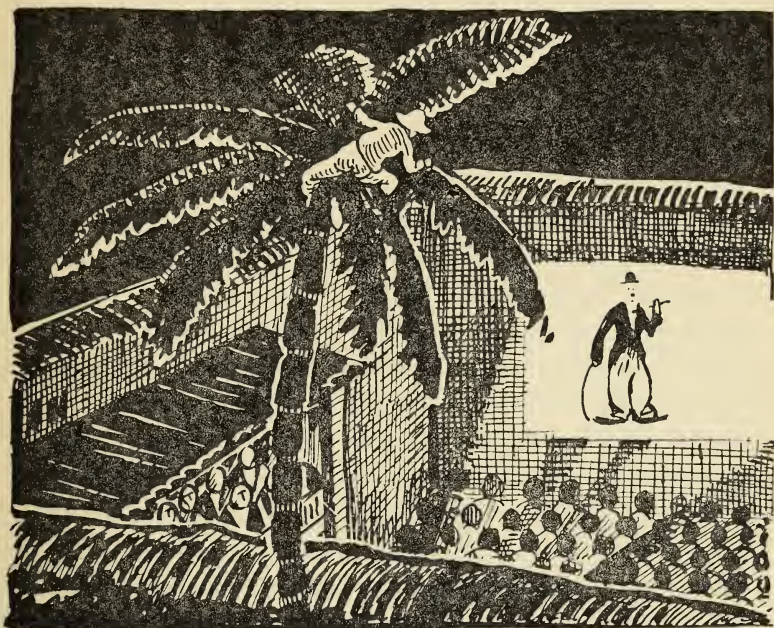
LAGOS SANDWICH-MEN

A second exhibition of Charlie given for the schoolchildren of Lagos was again interrupted, this time by the humour of the schoolgirls, who had been segregated in the balcony. Finding the boys' heads massed below them, the girls in the front rows had amused themselves by selecting any prominent pate as target for spittle. Even the delights of Charlie could not make the boys tolerate this inconvenience for long; they tried to storm the balcony, but were beaten from the staircase by the Krooboy engineer armed with a heavy spanner.

However, there is little need to give other examples of the world-wide popularity of Charlie Chaplin. In the hearts of almost every race, no matter whether it is European, Oriental, African, Celestial, or Esquimo, the genius of Charlie has been recognized and is welcomed. Only in America, from which the greater part of his humour has been drawn, is Charlie looked on with a rather dubious face.

## Hollywood—The Comic Film

This does not mean that in the States the films of Charlie are not packed, nor that the intellectuals refuse him the film pre-eminence that he is accorded by all the intellectuals of Europe. The children and the poor ensure his overwhelming success. But the *bourgeoisie* instinctively repudiate



CHARLIE IN WEST AFRICA

him. He stands for something that denies the whole of their collective philosophy. He proclaims the importance of subtle spiritual values that may lie behind failure, and he creates poems of humour praising the resilience of the feckless.

The members of the great *bourgeoisie* may be amused at Charlie in spite of themselves, but there is something in him repugnant to them. Thus, the newspapers and the self-righteous fall like wolves on his unfortunate matrimonial experiences. In fact—Charlie being above the ordinary

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

processes of the Black List—we heard one leading club woman exclaim :

“ That Charlie Chaplin, he’s got to look after himself. I tell you that if he has one more scandal the whole of the women’s clubs of America are going to combine against him. We shall issue a boycott against his films, and any cinema house that dares to show him will be ostracized. Then you’ll see what your great Mr Chaplin looks like. He just can’t outrage the great American public too far.”

. . . . .

Ever since we have returned to Europe the first question we have been asked on all sides is : “ Did you meet Charlie Chaplin ? ” We did not.

We did not want to meet him casually. He is probably the most pestered man in Hollywood, and, if even the most ordinary star must erect a defence around himself as a protection for his personal liberty against the intrusion of the outside world, then Chaplin must need trenches and barbed-wire entanglements. His star-meeting-the-public manner should be a masterpiece of polite camouflage, although he is, unlike many of his rivals and peers, a thoroughly versatile man, interested in the arts and sciences and in things beyond the provincialism of the movies. For instance, while we were in Hollywood he was sponsoring a special troupe of Japanese actors who gave remarkable exhibitions of their peculiarly dramatic and rhythmic acting.

We were flattering ourselves on being especially fortunate, for through his camera-man we had permission to sketch on the sets during the progress of his coming production. He was due to start work at any moment ; the principal sets were already built, but Chaplin, as yet unsatisfied with the script, had retired to his house in Santa Monica, where he had shut himself away from intrusion. Time

## *Hollywood—The Comic Film*

passed, but the date for the start was set back from week to week.

At that moment I was on the point of being appointed art and technical consultant for a Malay film. This opportunity had come about oddly enough. Had I tried to find work in the movies I might have striven in vain. I should have had to haunt parties, to impress my personality, to get drunk with the right persons, to flatter, to boost, and to become a regular 'yes man.' I had to do none of these things. Chance decided that we should watch the filming of Conrad's *Rescue*, as we have said. In it a rapsallion trading skipper of the Coast was tricked out in gold lace as though he were a naval lieutenant; his equally rapsallion Malay crew had a kind of uniform; his headman was and looked an Indian; the Malay village was musical comedy; a wandering Moslem pirate, got up like an Annamese dancer, dangled with jewels, while his temporary shack, built on the foreshore, had been painted in the latest pseudo-primitive-drawing-room style, and had, as a weathercock, a comic animal like something from a nursery frieze. This hut looked as though it had been designed by 'Bitchie' himself. The Moslem pirates, armed like Zulus, ran about in military formation. Thus did Hollywood treat Conrad.

I myself had been for two years in Malay, and I damned the piece heartily to Ornitz, who, seeing the opportunity of helping a friend and of improving a contemplated Conrad production, suggested that I should be appointed technical and art director. My sketches, exhibited to the supervisors, were approved.

At once into my mind leapt the dream of improving the movies. This film I determined should be a thoroughly artistic performance. But a hitch occurred. Emil Jannings demanded the services of the director, and the Malay film was postponed for three months at least.

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

Now £60 a week for two months, or about £500 in all, is a very nice sum to come tumbling unexpectedly into one's lap. It would have given us a nest-egg which we could bring back to Europe. But £500 spread over five months in Hollywood shows less profit. The doctor still forbade me to cross the American continent, but the feeling was growing that if we delayed much longer in California we should become crazy with the gay gloom that hangs over Hollywood. Every day made us feel more emphatically Europeans. Merely as a relief from the small parochialism of the place, we had taken refuge in fantasy and had written a long fairy-book.

Suddenly we sold the aged car, packed our baggage, and set off for home *via* the Panama Canal, thus forfeiting not only the chance of "reforming the movies," but also that of sketching Charlie Chaplin at work.

Though we were unable to watch Charlie Chaplin, the genius of the films, we were able to visit the studios of another brilliant English comedian, Lupino Lane.

"I had an awful time here to begin with," Lane said to us. "Of course, I had all my European reputation behind me, but I preferred to start again on my own talents. I had to start right from the bottom. Over here I ought to have used all my previous publicity. I ought to have got my contract before leaving Europe. It isn't talent alone that helps you along in this place."

The studio where Lupino had elected to make his film was incongruously labelled "Educational Films, Inc.," but there was little of an educational nature in Lupino's production. He was specializing in short, grotesque comedies; a business extremely profitable, although his ultimate ambition was fixed on the longer comedy, which alone conferred the genuine first magnitude of stardom on an actor.

Here was little of the wealth that distinguished the more

## *Hollywood—The Comic Film*

important lots. Expense was cut to the lowest limits. The scenery was the simplest that could be devised for the purpose, since in the comic film the movement goes so quickly that little picture-making on artistic lines can be attempted. No orchestra stimulated the actors to higher flights of comedy. Perhaps few musical pieces are comic enough for the purpose.

A genuine comic film depends neither on scenery nor on plot. The work of raising laughter is no comic matter, for almost all genuine laughter grows out of solemnity. A good comic story needs to be simple and to have good situations. Although building up comedy from simple scenes is more difficult the result is more comic than one which strains after exaggeration. The appeal is more fundamental and universal.

For instance, what could be more everyday than the arrival at a seaside lodging of a family embarrassed by too much luggage? It may happen to anyone. Yet over that situation we watched Lupino Lane, his brother, who acted seconds to him, the author, the director, the camera-man, and even the gaffer (or chief electrician) work for a whole afternoon. The situation was debated as seriously as if it were a Parliamentary Bill. Each person had a favourite notion of how the thing should be done. After a long discussion, tending at times to become acrid, for no man can be more bitter and obstinate than one who has an idea he believes to be funny, Lupino's brother rose and dramatized his version. With this the author disagreed. He in turn took the stage, pointing out where the brother had been weak and where he, the author, was right. In the middle of the subsequent argument the camera-man acted his version, to be followed by the director. Although, as visitors, we were outside of the game, each disputant eyed us, hoping to catch our smiles approving of his idea. But the thing was so serious that we

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

dared not laugh. The prime comedy was the furious solemnity of the discussion, which reached a height of fun unintended by the participants, possibly more comic than the resultant act could be. Even the gaffer had a word in the matter.

The only one who took little part in the talk was Lupino himself. But just as we thought that author and camera-man must come to blows he stood up. The complete idea was shaped in his brain. Picking a piece from this and a fragment from that, he fused the whole and added another actor. At once a messenger was sent to the street to bring in a passing taxi, and the central casting-bureau was asked by telephone to supply the extra man at once.

The taxi-man drove in and took up his *rôle* with the greatest nonchalance, for in Hollywood at any moment a taxi-man may be called on to become a movie actor. We should not be surprised to find their meters calibrated in four grades: (1) mileage; (2) time; (3) night; (4) movie work. The extra actor arrived after a surprisingly short interval, and the scene was staged.

In the completed act there was hardly a trick that had not been used on the movies a hundred times before, but the combination was made in a new way and became all the funnier because the devices were old. It was like a novel cocktail, a reportioning of familiar ingredients, which sounds easy enough. But a peculiar talent is required to effect just this kind of reportioning. Lupino and his movie family drove up to the door half a dozen times. Half a dozen times he had to get entangled in the superfluity of his luggage, suit-cases, hat-boxes, parcels, fishing-rods, golf-bag. Half a dozen times the hired extra would stop him, demanding a light for his cigar. And half a dozen times Lupino, once more a man mingled with luggage, had to fall head first through the front door. During the rehearsal in this last, precipitous plunge the actor dislocated his thumb.

## *Hollywood—The Comic Film*

But comic films can't halt for dislocated thumbs. It was hastily pulled back, and three times more with the same quality of recklessness he had to dive again. Which demanded pluck.

It is hard to realize how much the broadly comic film depends on subtlety. We are inclined to think of the comic film with a slight sense of superiority. To be comic, grotesque, to play the fool, in other words, seems a trivial trick, yet watching a world's fool-maker at work convinced us that here was something in many ways more elusive and more difficult than the art of the merely dramatic movie. It is easier to make a man weep than to make him laugh. The devices for wringing his heart, for rousing his lust or stirring his sentimental sympathy, act time and time again without fail. A good leg, or a dewy kiss, or a deserted wife, properly staged, bring infallible reactions, but the custard-tart has splashed too often on the wrong man's face. The former depend for their effects on the expected, but comedy devices depend on the unexpected and stale off with infallible rapidity.

One of the acts showed us the elusive nature of the comic scene. On the first rehearsal any observer would have decided that trying to wring fun from the visible ingredients was hopeless heroism. The business was so old, so unamusing in itself, that we wanted to sigh rather than titter. And yet, without adding a single new idea to the script, it became extremely amusing. The whole comedy of the scene was achieved by—rhythm; and the chief element of the comic depended not on the devices employed, but on a series of interlocked movements by the actors. The more each actor fitted his gestures as an exact response to those of another player the funnier did the scene become. So, to effect a perfect harmony of action, the business was orchestrated, with the director calling out: "One, two, three; one, two,

## Star-dust in Hollywood

three," thus controlling the actors' movements as if they were set to bars of music.

A great difference between the average film and the comic is that a reading of the average script often gives promise of better things than the finished picture. Though fundamentally the film is not naturally adapted to telling a story,



COUNTING THE RHYTHM INTO IT

it must do so, forced from the outside for commercial reasons. The story in the comic film is of little importance. The comedy concentrates on grotesque visible happenings, things themselves inherent in the art of picture-making.

The script gives little idea of the finished comedy; even the acted scenes are not often very comic to watch. The full flavour of the fun in a 'comic' shows on the screen only, while in an ordinary film the scenes as acted seem often far more effective than they appear in the filmed version. We noticed this especially in *The Docks of New York*.

The comic does not separate the fun from the visual form, so that in long films such as those of Chaplin or in short

## *Hollywood—The Comic Film*

ones as these of Lupino Lane the silent film reaches a suitability to its medium that is one of the essential elements of a true art.

The ordinary film is always the creation of a number of people : the author, the continuity, the gag-man, the director, and so on ; the comic film on the other hand depends almost entirely on the talent of the leading comedian, thus reaching a unity missing from any but the pictures of the big fixed stars. The talent of the chief comedian does not depend on his power of being funny, but on his gift for using the unexpected ; not on his grimaces, but on the ingenuity of his imagination. The best comic characters are serious, even pathetic men to whom incongruous things happen. The man who tries to be funny usually ends in being a bore.

The big film uses many camera tricks and stunts ; few such are needed in the comics. Charlie's films are almost always straight photography. Comic films are exercises in new combinations of old ideas, new rhythms or unexpected endings to outworn situations. For instance, in one film Lupino drives an old Ford car into a tunnel just as an express enters at the other end. A number of endings are possible, but most suggest catastrophe. We expect him to come out clinging to the funnel or in rags clasping the ruins of the steering-wheel. But when he emerges at the other end, his car flattened to a pancake between the locomotive and the side of the tunnel, but still going strong, the solution is so ludicrous that a roar of laughter bursts out naturally.

The ingenuity of the comedian cannot rest for a moment during production. He hovers on the edge of creating boredom, but must always avoid the fall. Jokes wear out more quickly than a cheap shoe in a thunder-shower.

And at last the comic film must pass a test more rigorous than any other. At the big first showings, or *premières*, the new dramatic film is always hailed as the best that has ever

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

been made. But during the showing of a comic film the agents sit at the *premieres* with counting dials in their hands. The Hollywood audience is the most sophisticated film audience in the world, but woe betide the comic film that does not register at least forty laughs, not counting minor titters and giggles !

America has a habit of deriding the English sense of humour. Indeed, the world at large, in spite of our great humorous authors, persistently looks on us as a heavy nation inclined toward the graver sides of life. And yet we may reflect with some satisfaction that in Hollywood, where most of the world's film talent has concentrated, two most prominent exponents, one of the long comedy and one of the short comic, are both English—Charlie Chaplin and Lupino Lane.



LUPINO LANE

## *Chapter XIII*

### HOLLYWOOD—THE CAMERA-MAN

ONE of the publicity men working for the United Artists was not as other publicity men. He had not, in the modern mass enthusiasm so stimulated in America, elevated his task into a matter of worship. He was a friendly young man, who did not daily utter his profession of faith, which, instead of "I believe in Allah, and in Mohammed the prophet of Allah," is, "I believe in the Movies, and in Publicity the prophet of the Movies." He had other ambitions. Literary desires and a passion for the real truth of Early Western Romance had bitten him. He had written biographies of those rather uncongenial celebrities Billy the Kid and Wild Bill Hickock, and at the moment was working out a novel which dealt, rather rashly perhaps for a man in his position, with the actual facts about the murder of a well-known Hollywood director, an affair which had almost implicated several well-known female stars.

I was sketching a huge ballroom scene, a picture of glittering gaiety in a palatial hall which exhibited its structure of flimsy lath and plaster wherever the eye of the cameras could not reach. This play was interesting apart from its scenic effects, for it had two rival feminine stars. The one was by birth French, who was self-dazzled, and therefore rendered very disagreeable, by her own eminence, a nationalistic trait. In fact, she had but recently returned to active work, having spent some six months on the Black List for 'temperament.' The other, a wild young Mexican actress of no education, picked up by a touring director from some third-rate Mexican cabaret, had not yet slurred off the

## Star-dust in Hollywood

Mexican music-hall sufficiently to acquire a true sense of the caste due to large earnings. All through the film a duel of feminine malice had been raging between the two, probably started by the Frenchwoman but parried with spirit by her Mexican rival.

Gautier, in his *Voyage en Espagne*, has noted his amazement



DIGNITY AND IMPUDENCE

at the language of even the ladies of Granada ; there is no doubt that the young Mexican actress's language was extremely Granadan. At the word "Cut !" after the strain of a furious love episode, when she had to squeeze tears from her eyes, aided as much as possible by the strains of *Oh, Baby Mine* throbbed from the violin, she broke from the arms of her movie beloved and, as a relief, broke into an interlude of Mexican profanity that even a bull-fighter might have been proud of. The French actress was posing as a duchess ; she was therefore imbued with all the attributes of

## *Hollywood—The Camera-man*

mimicry borrowed from the part, and expressed her disdain of such 'lowness' by grimaces, twitches of the nose, and movements of her magnificent shoulders such as only a Frenchwoman can make. A year before she would have walked off the lot, but the Black List had disciplined her. Another scandal on the sets and her ostracism might become permanent. In return the Mexican girl, full of the pride that inspires the meanest of Spanish peoples, exaggerated her naughtiness whenever she was near the Frenchwoman. Yet when the director yelled "Cameras!" they were bound to take the stage together and simulate sweetness and smiles while hate was stewing in their hearts.

"By the way," said the young publicity man, "there's one chap you should get to know on this set, and that's Harry Hitzler. See, he's up there."

He pointed to an elevated platform a little above our heads. From this angle Mr Hitzler, with his back toward us and bending over his camera, was little more than a pair of trouser-leg pipes supporting a voluminous hemisphere of behind and a canopy of coat-tail.

"I'll make you known to him," said my publicity man. "Get him to talk to you. He's seen more of this game than most of us put together. He was right in it practically from the first."

"Say, Harry!" he shouted up, seeing that the camera-man had completed his adjustments. "I want you to meet my friend Mr Gordon. I've been telling him you are one of the oldest hands in the game. He's an artist, making sketches round the studios, see!"

"Pleased to meet you," said Mr Hitzler, reaching down an enormous hand. "So you're drawing, eh? Doing it for publicity?"

"No," I answered. "I'm going to make a set of etchings. Art work, you know."

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

"Well, there aren't many that know the film game like I do," said Mr Hitzler, climbing down from his elevation. "And you'll believe me if I tell you that I gave D.W. here his first job. And I tell you that I was the first man that turned a camera on to Mary Pickford. That's film history, that is. And look at me now. Third camera-man for D.W.; glad and grateful that he's given me the job, too. Yes, I am. And I'm coming back, too. That's what they said I'd never be able to do."

"But why . . ." I exclaimed.

Mr Hitzler made a significant gesture of lifting a glass to his lips.

"Just hitting it up," said Mr Hitzler, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. "Why, I was plain soused for more than a coupl'a years. Yes, they said: 'You can't give a job to Harry. He's pickled for good.' I tell yah I was that down I was peddling kids' toys round the studios to get sump'n to drink. Do you know those buzzers, you squeeze a handle and a wheel spins and sparks come off like these automatic lighters? You know? Well, I'd get round some of the studios, and I'd squeeze one of them off behind a resistance-box. Then I'd call to the gaffer. 'Say, gaffer,' I'd tell him, 'you got a short here.' And that feller would go round hunting for that short-circuit like he was crazy. Then I'd show him the trick, and he'd buy the thing to play it off on some other juicer. I sold hundreds of them things that way. That's how I was. I got tired of being told that I'd never come back. Made me kind of mad. So I just went on the water-wagon for a whole year; yes, I did; and D.W. gave me this job, and I'm staying. I tell you, mister, that I've got another thing here right now in my pocket that will bring me another fortune when it's sprung. But I tell you straight, I'm glad I went under and was poor again for a spell. I'd kind of lost myself,

## *Hollywood—The Camera-man*

if you understand, and then somehow I got myself back again.”

Conversations on the movie set are often interrupted at the most interesting moment. Harry had to climb hurriedly back to his elevation.

Rumour said that Harry's two-years souse was the result of domestic disappointment. At one time he and his wife had been sitting in an hotel on Broadway, New York, throwing diamonds out of the window to see the crowds scramble for them. He had been induced to settle most of his money on his wife, who had then died suddenly, leaving the whole amount to her lover. This was the shock that had driven Mr Hitzler to the solace of the whisky bottle.

“I was turning in the days when Goldwyn and Lasky and a lot of other of these millionaires had only a hired garage to make pictures in. And that wasn't so long ago, neither,” he said. “We played a fine game on Schenck, Lasky, and De Mille the other day at a swell dinner. We told them they all had to make speeches on the future of the movies and we were going to shoot them with sound. We brought in the lights and the cameras and the micro and set up the business just like the whole was real. I tell you they were all as nervous as cats. They stammered and got red and white. But there wasn't an inch of film in the cameras, and the micro wasn't connected up either. . . .”

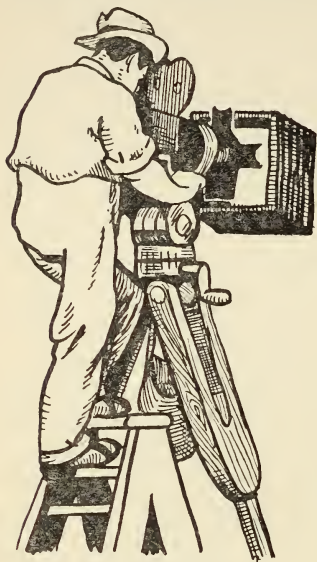
“D'I ever tell you how we got through the English censorship in the War?” he said, on another occasion. “We had to show all our takings to a coupl'a haw-haw colonels or something. They pranced into the projection-room slung round with great bags with locks on them. And every time we came to something they didn't like they'd say:

“‘Cut out that bit, Mistah Operator.’

“And we'd solemnly snip it off and give it to them, and they'd shove it into the bags and lock it up so's it shouldn't

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

escape. Then they chalked all our reels O.K., and we could pack them off. But what d'you think? The dam' fools had only got the positives, while we sent off the negatives complete to America."



THE CAMERA

Harry claimed to be the first who had used the close-up and the vignette. He had invented the fade-out one day by leaning his hand accidentally on the diaphragm regulator as he was turning the camera.

. . . . .

Much as the artist stands between the continuity and the visual reality of the pictures, so the camera-man stands between the director and the recorded film. His importance is second only to that of the director himself. As

a rule, the director concentrates on the emotion, the acting, and the continuity of the story, and leaves much of the composition and the lighting to the camera-man. Few directors are as careful in their actual pictured work as Von Sternberg or Murnau. Few trouble to see exactly what the camera-man is doing, but trust implicitly to his knowledge. This leads to a duality of control in the making of the pictures that is by no means an advantage to the film as a work of art.

Emotional and dramatic effects depend much on the lighting. A hard, concentrated light on one person forces him forward, increases his importance, and, by a transference of visible qualities to the subconscious, increases the impact of his character; a quiet or even lighting diminishes importance and softens mood; contrast intensifies action, darkness

## *Hollywood—The Camera-man*

gives mystery. With the thousands of effects possible, a good camera-man can either assist his director or handicap him unbelievably. A good director may make an excellent film with second-rate actors, but he cannot make any kind of film at all without the assistance of a good camera-man.

The lighting is supplied even out of doors by concentrated batteries of lamps, either arc or incandescent, and by large reflectors made of silver-paper. These have to be adjusted to their utmost photographic possibilities by the camera-man, who must estimate the resultant photograph by looking at the scene through properly tinted glasses. But the capacity of inventing new methods of lighting, and of composing novel dramatic effects by means of light, is clearly rare. How rare it is may be realized by looking for it in a number of films. And what a satisfaction is felt when this quality is found ! Thus the really brilliant camera-man is one of the happy persons of Hollywood. No actor could possibly have come back under the conditions of Harry Hitzler. Directors and stars may come and go ; they depend on the fickle faithfulness of the box office. They have to hunt for their next jobs. But the efficient camera-man has a good contract in his pocket, with no Purity Clause, and he deserves it.

The process of regulating the huge lamps to fit a picture is accompanied by a picturesque slang of which the following phrases are examples :

Nigger off them broads.  
Another silk on that one.  
Move your kidney out a bit.  
Throw down that wampus.  
Make that baby a bit hotter.  
Kill your scoops there.  
Use an inkey for this.  
Swing that sun over.  
Hit that thirty-six.

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

Niggers and kidneys are black shades of different shapes ; silks are the semi-transparent screens to dim the intensity of a light. Kleigs, scoops, babys, wampus, broads, and suns are varieties of lights ; inkeys are incandescent lamps much used in the movietone on account of their silence. Oddly



A JUICER

enough, apart from the slang of the electrician, or 'juicer,' the movies have not evolved much jargon with any distinctive character.

The camera-man's skill must be high and his courage almost as great. No matter in what situation the scene has to be photographed the camera-man with his ponderous apparatus must get there to photograph it. It is he who climbs masts, hangs from shrouds, skyscrapers, or precipices, is tied to the outside of speeding railway-trains, and so on, while the director megaphones from some less risky spot.

Here is a table showing the various controlling and constructing participators in the film and the different elements entering into its composition :

<i>The Story</i>		<i>The Picture</i>	
The Taboos	} THE FINISHED FILM	Artist	}
Author		Decorators and wardrobe	
Continuity		Fake-inventor	
Comedy-consultant		Carpenters and modellers	
Director		Technical expert	
Stars		Director	
Supervisor		Stars	
Titles		Camera-man	
		Cutter or editor	

And of these the continuity can hash the author ; the

## *Hollywood—The Camera-man*

director can hash the continuity; the artist can hash the technical expert; stars can hash both director and artist; camera-man can hash what is left; and editor or titles finish the remainder. We may be tempted to wonder how the film as a work of art has ever made its appearance.

One peculiar aspect of Hollywood, not often commented upon, is its quality as a silver-mine, exceeding, in fact, the output of Idaho, the third greatest silver-mining state in America.

We can hardly call Hollywood a silver-mine, however; it should rather be called a vomitorium, forced to disgorge the precious metal that it has digested in its waste film and fixing solutions. Roughly, Hollywood reclaims eight and a half million dollars' worth of silver every year. This silver is, of course, the sensitive material in the photographic film; on exposure to the light it blackens after development, different degrees of illumination producing different degrees of light and shade. The unblackened silver is dissolved from the films by the fixing processes. Paramount studios alone use some five or six million feet of film per annum. By a simple chemical process the silver salts in the waste material and in the dissolving-baths are converted back to raw material.



SHIFTING A THIRTY-SIX

## Chapter XIV

### HOLLYWOOD—THE BAND OF HOPE

DURING the preceding winter chance had landed us one day from an old-fashioned stern-wheeled steamer at a small town on the banks of the Mississippi. It was a typical small river town of the South. On the low, muddy foreshore, shacks, roosting temporarily till the next flood should sweep them away or built on flat barges which would float in case of danger, were clustered among the trees which hid the high dyke, called in Southern parlance the levee. The road winding up over this dyke gave us a sudden view over the little township of more stable houses clustered under its shelter. It looked sedate enough, but the skipper of the steamer had told us that most of the principal inhabitants were under arrest, an informer having sold the whereabouts of all the private stills hidden in the surrounding swamps.

The local hotel might well have been designed for a film of *Huckleberry Finn*. In the rough lounge heavily booted men lolled in rocking-chairs, their feet higher than their heads. They spent their leisure in shooting with infallible accuracy plug-stained saliva into the big brass spittoons, or, bowing perhaps to American hygienic ideals, in sterilizing it at once against the hot sides of the tall, sizzling stove. Their talk was of lumber. As a variation to this solemn subject they chaffed a pretty girl, daughter of the proprietor, who, working industriously with her needle, sat among them, a complacent target for their clumsy compliments and doubtless a lure for custom.

The men voiced what seemed to be a town grievance,

## *Hollywood—The Band of Hope*

that, pretty and smart as she was, she refused to set off to Hollywood to try her fortune.

“Nice figure I’d make going off to Hollywood,” she confided to Jo. “Me, brought up in a little bum place like this and going amongst all them swell stars. Don’t I know that I’m better off here with them all thinking I’d be a great success than coming back with my tail between my legs and all my money spent?”

And yet, paradoxically enough, a girl so well balanced was possibly the very kind of girl who might have climbed to success at Hollywood. For never was there a place where feminine beauty counted less and feminine vitality more. But even with her well-balanced mentality she might not have been able to pass the portals—not those entrance portals with buzzing or clattering doors, for to be sitting on the plush-covered seats waiting for somebody is already a big step upward; the doors to which we refer are the doors of the central casting-bureau. Here the aspirant must apply for work. Unless she can show some recommendation from a director or an assistant, she is only wasting her time. As in Monte Carlo, if she has not the money with which to return home, her ticket is paid and she is shipped back without delay. All the professions are full in Hollywood, even the oldest.

For Hollywood may spell disillusion for lovely woman. Here she is told the exact value of her face, which, unless it is backed by an arresting personality, is exactly that of a weekly wage-earner in a shop, restaurant, or drug-store.

The casting-bureau has, they say, at least twenty thousand names on its books, all listed under their possible and characteristic parts, so that here Gilbert’s lyric is only too true :

Lord Chancellors were cheap as rats,  
And Bishops in their shovel hats  
Were commoner than tabby cats . . .  
And Dukes were three a penny.

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

Twenty thousand extras, but work for one thousand at the utmost.

One day we received an invitation to the private view of a film called *The Life and Death of a Hollywood Extra*. It was an experimental work by a young Serbian camera-man, who had not only the common ambition to reform the movies, but a dash of practical initiative as well.

We were brought to an artist's studio. Men and women of the semi-intellectual classes were crowding politely together on insufficient seats. The darkness closed over us, and the amateur projector began to flicker its uncertain images on the screen. *The Life and Death of a Hollywood Extra*, an ambitious little scenario, had been produced with a capital of only twenty pounds. There was but one actor, and we understand that two arc-lamps and a camera provided the total equipment. Twenty pounds against the millions of the big movie corporations; one small Serb pulling a long nose at Mr Goldwyn, Mr Thalberg, and Mr Lasky, and all the other magnates.

Shadows, silhouettes, grotesques, cut-paper mechanisms; cubism, futurism; states of mind suggested by symbols, by superimposed images, by strange and novel tricks of light and shade. The figure of the extra, his forehead marked and numbered by the finger of Hollywood's deity, the casting-bureau, pervaded the strange fantasy, at first hopeful, later sinking into despair, repudiated continually from studio doors by the relentless notice: "No casting to-day." Waiting; waiting at the telephone for the call to work that never came, dreaming of the 'break' (magic word!) that should herald the fortune denied to him. Death at last by starvation and a grotesque ascent to heaven on a mechanical funicular railway, to be welcomed there by a glittering notice: "Casting to-day." Such was this little film, witty, full of new ideas and pattern-work, opening up fields of pictorial research.

## *Hollywood—The Band of Hope*

It was received in a dull silence.

"I don't think much of that," said a woman's voice behind us. "Silly and ugly I call it."

We turned and stared at her. She was the apotheosis of Oshkosh femininity grown older. How can the movies improve with such as the chief critics of cinema values? We rose from our seats to congratulate the young author.

"Thank you," he answered. "I have been trying to get the studios interested in my ideas for a long time. They would not listen to me at all. But now that I have satirized them, and have shown how real films may be produced for little money, they have given me a good contract, to keep my mouth shut."

He at any rate had his 'break.'

But he was no extra—he was not one of the twenty thousand hopefuls. He was an inventive young man with ideas and capacity. The other twenty thousand whom he had depicted by a single image were what? Camera-fodder, little more. Yet each, like a soldier of Napoleon, thought that he carried in his knapsack the baton of a marshal, or, in this case, of a star.

"Some day," each thinks, "I shall catch the director's eye." In *The Docks of New York* the lads plugged one another with a will, each dreaming of his break. "Would it come this time?" In the big ballroom scene which Harry Hitzler was shooting every dancer moved under Griff's eye. Was the break coming now? At night on Santa Monica beach in the travesty of Conrad each Moslem pirate paraded a stained skin with the ever-present hope that some extra vigorous gesture, some unparalleled ferocity of expression, would bring him out beyond his comrades.

But, alas! the casting-bureau had them in its firm grip. On its sheets, more remorseless than those of the Recording Angel—since the casting-bureau clerk never drops a tear,

## Star-dust in Hollywood

though she might drop her lip-stick—each extra is immutably fixed in his position. He is ticketed and labelled. A good-looking young Englishman, a captain during the War, had



WAITING FOR HER  
'BREAK'

once made a success as a valet. Henceforth and for ever he is to be a valet. He may struggle, protest, he may have himself photographed as a number of other possible characters, valet he will remain. Nobody will test him in another rôle. For him no 'break' can come unless a film should be written with a valet as hero. Then his perfect valeting might spew him out among the stars. Another Englishman, who fifteen years ago was a *matinée* darling in London, is for ever a barman with sleekly oiled hair. Yet even so these are the luckier ones. To be recognized as one of the five best valets in Hollywood or as the Metro-Goldwyn barman places you almost among the minor constellations. You may not have your name on the back of a chair, you may have to be content with long hours of waiting on a rough bench, playing bridge, but

you are nevertheless one of the brighter spots that shine through the general diffused luminosity of the Milky Way. You are almost as noteworthy as a chimpanzee or a trained dog, and possibly superior to a talent special. You usually have the privilege of haunting some *salons* of the Movie Great and of cadging personally for jobs.

For in the Milky Way of extradom there are degrees of brightness, as among the stars themselves. In Fairbanks' *Twenty Years After* there were the courtiers, persons capable

## *Hollywood—The Band of Hope*

of wearing swords or velvet with distinction, paid for a certain elegance of backbone (one was a French countess in real life, waiting also for her 'break'). Others acted as cavaliers, and had to be capable of sticking to a horse in motion and of handling weapons in that position; while others were merely so much space-filling-in mass, commanded by trumpets of loud-speakers that blared out the assistant director's voice. There were many signs by which you could know the star from the extra, but perhaps no surer one than by the patronage of the ice-cream wagon, an incongruous object among that medley of seventeenth-century magnificence. In this film an



BOX LUNCHES FOR CAVALIERS

equally incongruous spectacle was to see the courtiers line up for the free 'box lunches' provided by the management.

"I will say this," exclaimed a musketeer to a city burgess, as they came from the provision trestle each carrying a cardboard box containing sandwiches, cheese, lettuce-salad, and cake, "Fairbanks sure does treat yer white."

Jo had a sketching-stool, a light mechanism of thin steel tubes and canvas which could be folded into small dimensions.

"You gets mighty tired standing about," said one extra to her, "and you can't just sit anywheres, you might soil your clothes. That's a handy thing. . . . French, is it? Wonderful goods they carries in France, I should say. Be mighty useful to us, it would."

"I don't know about that either," said another. "You get sitting about some and you'll soon find you ain't getting as much work as you used to do. If a director see you

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

carrying one of them things around he might get the idea you was lazy."

"That's true too," agreed the first woman. "You gotta watch your step sure, or you'll soon fade out."

"You gotta watch your step." Directors may waste thousands on shooting twelve reels when they need no more than seven, or on transporting location companies to dried-up lakes; on buying books that are impracticable as films, or on keeping stars soaking in ice-cold tanks for several nights at £300 a night and then cutting out the whole scene; but they do not waste money on extras. The extra who does not watch her step goes head first into the dustbin even more ruthlessly than does the outworn fluffy girl. Supply and demand: or, woe betide the extra who, in a seventeenth-century film, has an unreflecting chaw at her gum.

Chewing-gum is the assistant director's bugbear. The much-advertised product of Mr Wrigley which spots the platforms of the New York Underground so thickly that one walks as if on rubber flagstones, the chewing-gum that the casual labourer or the children leave sticking to all the undersides of mantels, chairs, and tables, the chewing-gum that saves American lovers from conversation, yet lends their minds but a single thought, the chewing-gum whose minty flavour apparently assists the act of worship and gives Aimee McPherson's revival audiences the expression of cud-ruminative cattle, has cost the movies many a million dollars. The conscientious assistant director must have nightmares of chewing-gum. In his dreams gigantic jaws champ rhythmically—he may imagine that he has become a divided personality, one half of which is Mr Wrigley himself pouring out the hygienic blessings of his gum upon the eagerly receptive States, while the other half is trying to control a crowd of one million extras who chaw relentlessly. Von Stroheim, Hollywood's most sticklerish director, is notorious for having

## *Hollywood—The Band of Hope*

held up the action of a huge crowd costing hundreds a minute because the sword of one of the characters was not correct (which among so much carelessness seems a little like a gilding of the lily), but many a young woman with a chaw of gum stuck to her palate has wasted more money than Von Stroheim and has ruined all her future prospects of any possible 'break.' For there is no mistaking the familiar action, the long, deliberate movement of the chin, the vertical elasticity of the lips, the inwardly turned expression of the eye, as if contemplating the sweetened flow of saliva toward the digestive tract. You cannot mistake it for toffee-eating, nor even for its first cousin, the mastication of a tobacco-plug. In any film the period of which predates Mr Wrigley's birth it is the one anachronism that American audiences cannot fail to perceive, and, tolerant of almost any inaccuracy in European manners or customs, they are intolerant of this.

. . . . .

If he averages two days' work a week the ordinary extra can be considered lucky. He earns a salary of £1 a day for crowd work and £1 10s. if sufficiently distinguished to wear evening-dress. A salary of £2 or £3 a week in America means nothing less than starvation. So that an extra must use his wits if he would not be left behind by his competitors. For instance, a young cavalier in purple velvet confided to Jo :

"They called for a lot of us to be picked for this job, 'n then they weeded us out. 'You're no good,' they says to me. 'Bad luck!' I answers, but I just slips round while they weren't looking and I joins up with the row of accepted ones. Three times they combed us through, and each time they turns me out, but I only says, 'Ain't that too bad?' and slips in amongst the picked ones again. And here I am, and I don't know that anybody is complaining of me."

A few days later Jo heard the same lad trying to teach his

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

methods to a girl, but the latter proved to be as hard-boiled a baby as the lad himself.

"You ought to know my friend," said the boy, "I'm sure he'll be useful to you."

"Well," declared the girl, "if you say he'll be useful I don't mind so much. Yeah! I like my sleep nights, and I'm not going to waste my time on any more fellers who can't help me along some. . . ."

As the lad continued to urge the virtues of his friend, the girl interrupted:

"Well, as I says, if he's going to help me it goes. But I want to know first. I've told you where I get off. If a girl don't look after herself nobody else's going to. . . ."

. . . . .

Sing a song of Hollywood, town of Jazz and fake,  
Twenty thousand optimists waiting for a break.

Their optimism never falters. One week they are French peasantry of the seventeenth century, the next they are Roman citizens, and after that they are Swiss villagers. All day they loiter on the lot waiting for the call that springs them into action for ten minutes; dreary waiting; watching their step; yet each time that the whistle blows hope renews itself. No doubt among them are many who have as much talent as the stars themselves, but how can one show an extra talent by rushing on to the scene and waving a handkerchief?

Indeed, on the two occasions I have myself figured before the cameras I too have had the conviction that, given a proper chance, I could show the stars something about the art of the movies that they had not suspected. But I too, in spite of the fact that once I was a talent special and once a very minor star, am still waiting for my 'break.' No doubt many a man who is ruthlessly limited to playing the eternal valet, the eternal barman, or the eternal cardinal, is quite capable

## Hollywood—The Band of Hope

of rising to higher rôles. But the ins are ins. There is no room at the top.

Nor, indeed, can failure itself dull the glitter of the supers' optimism. The good humour and apparent care-free gaiety of this world of extras may cover heart-burnings,



THE EX-DIRECTOR

ambitious hopes never to be fulfilled; it covers tragedy also.

As I was sketching the potted Seine described in a former chapter an oldish man who was acting as the captain of the truncated yacht drew me into conversation.

"To tink," he said, speaking with an English accent strongly tinged with the American-German accent and waving his hand at the pageant simulating under the light of the Californian sun all the romance of moonlight on the Seine, "to tink, mister, t'at it vasn't no more'n eighteen months ago I'd 'ave 'ad de 'andling off all dat. Look at me now,

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

daking a chob ass an egstra at seffen tollars a tay. Yess, me vot vos vunce a director 'imself."

"A director!" I ejaculated in astonishment; his false whiskers idealized him and made him seem remote from any hint of possible Hollywood success.

"Sure," he said, "I vos directing for Anna Veigell. Vot a voman! She tink 'erself joost as big as Got Almighty. She vont everything joost as she like id, and herself in de mittle all de time. 'Anna,' I says to her, 'you can't make de film dat vay.' But vot can I do 'gainst her? She got de money. And she go on like a crazy t'ing, like a maniac. Vell, I dell you, it vos de most God-dam awful flop dat effer you see in your born life. And den it's me for de dump. Sure. You can't make a flop like dat in Hollywood an' get another chob. And me wit' a vife and four kids, and dis is de first chob I gets me in eighteen months. Dat's pooty mooch like hell, dat iss. And only to tink dat eighteen months ago I direct myself, yess. . . ."

As the assistant director of another film confessed:

"Sure I been a director. Flop? Why, you could have heard it from here to San Francisco. Ain't it just lousy when you gets to a place like that, and then, for no fault of your own, you goes straight to the bottom again! It's this way, mister. My leading man was drunk from the start to the finish. Half the time he didn't turn up on the sets, and when he did his acting was lousy. And we got 'way behind time on schedule. And, gee, it was a flop! Three months before I'd been thinking: 'I'm right at the top now, excuse my dust.' And then to find yourself clear at the bottom again, so deep down that you're clean out of sight. Nobody's going to use a flopped director: he might butt in. He's got to learn to be humble again. And he learns all right, I can tell you that. Sure he learns. Why, I couldn't even get a job in the Props Department. I tell you that a chap who

## *Hollywood—The Band of Hope*

flops in Hollywood's got to eat some dirt before they forgets it on him. . . ."

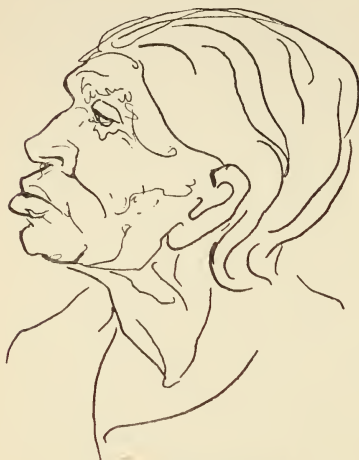
Egomania of the leading lady, drunkenness of the leading man ; good excuses both, and yet I could not help wondering what Von Sternberg would have done in such cases. Clearly, if ever there was a business for which a man must be born and not made it is this art of directing. For there can be no road by which one may learn. An assistant director has to order the actors about ; he may be permitted to arrange a few minor scenes, though not many ; but he has little chance of intimate contact with that strenuous imaginative labour of the director's mind, visualizing the whole, scene after scene, in pictured sequence. The task of the inexperienced director on his first film must be terrifying. It is almost as though a painter's apprentice who had done no more than mix his master's colours and clean his brushes were suddenly commanded to paint a great decoration that will cost some ten thousand pounds in paint and canvas. He has nobody that can help him. He must face alone a gigantic task and, although unpractised, carry it to a successful conclusion. Before he enters on the job he cannot know whether he is really capable or no ; nor, indeed, can anyone know. Small wonder, then, that excuses fly when flopped directors meet ! Small wonder that they must spend the rest of their lives explaining not only to the world, but to themselves ! Even Michelangelo set to a similar task and condemned to eternal sterility as the reward of an initial failure might be excused if he should flinch.

These were the greater tragedies of extradom, but there were others. One day we emerged from the studio with an untidy, small, dark, and unwashed creature, who had been arguing with young Cerberus.

He heard us speak, and, with the easy familiarity of the States, turned and addressed us :

## Star-dust in Hollywood

"It's English you are?" he said. "Well, Oi'm Oirrish meself, but it's a long time Oi've bin over here now. Did you ever see *Tarzan of the Apes*? No? Then you didn't see meself as the woild man.



MEXICAN EXTRA

And it's a treat you missed that time. That's me speciality, that is, woild man. It's a kind of a woolly head Oi've got on me. Some says that Oi've a bit of the naygur in me blood. Well, maybe Oi have, but it's little Oi'm bothering about it anyway. But a fine fuzzy head Oi've got, and a fine fuzzy beard Oi had; woild it was. But on me last job they had me shave it off, and they ruint me intoirely. Oi'll tell you

how it is, now. Oi can't make up me moind to set meself down and let it grow on me again. It would need time, you understand, and in the between it's little work that Oi'd be getting. But lacking it now Oi'm not the man Oi was; me woildness isn't the half of what it used to be. Oi'm regretting the day Oi let them shave it off me, that Oi am. It's no star Oi am, or they'd be paying me to grow it, and a nice, easy job that would be. . . ."

An extra is hired beard and all, but if a star must take a bearded part his salary begins from the first day that he neglects the razor.

. . . . .

A simple, kindly conglomeration of hopefuls, these twenty thousand extras, made up of examples from almost every nation under the sun: Americans, Europeans—many of

## *Hollywood—The Band of Hope*

whom can hardly understand English—Mexicans, Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Negroes, all blended in that easy-going democracy of the stage and of America combined. Seldom making up accounts with themselves to calculate that the chances of success are but little more than those of winning the Calcutta Sweep, they are strangely content with this dull, brainless life of long waiting interspersed with spasmodic moments of intense energy.

Some there were, however, who had stopped to calculate, and had in consequence stepped aside, preferring the solidity of a regular income to the delights of starving on illusions of to-morrow's 'break.' Of such were the hairdressers, the make-up men, and the doubles. At the close of any big success these would rush from their places of concealment as the cameras were changing place. The make-up men would dab the sweat from the principals' faces with small pieces of blotting-paper and would repair any damages that the complexions had suffered; the hairdressers would straighten any disordered locks or would bring in extra supplies from the big make-up table, where spare hair of many shades was fixed in combs. The doubles would relieve their stars for focusing purposes or for try-outs.

Clearly all these had registered their resignations from the great Band of Hope. No make-up man or hairdresser could ever shine starrily, and as for the doubles, they had become mere



HAWAIIAN SWIMMER

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

satellites, moons revolving round their planetary superiors, sure of employment as long as that star should continue to shine, yet aware that all chance of catching the director's eye had for ever been repudiated.

. . . . .

Behind these were the assistant directors, the script-girls, the musicians, the cutters, the electricians, and the scene-shifters. Of all these the assistant directors and the script-girls belonged also to the Band of Hope.

Assistant directors may become directors. Yet, as we have indicated, what a step! From pushing crowds about, from regulating the minor details of the scenes, from watching with unrelaxed vigilance for that devastating chewing-gum he must suddenly rise to a creative task. And the penalty of failure is the headlong crash to ruin and starvation.

The script-clerk is continuity or cutter in the bud. But it is a time of laborious budding. The script-clerk's work is never-ending. All day she sits there poring over her big book, controlling the scene, writing down every action, noting every variable detail. For if a scene has to be re-photographed the script-clerk must match it exactly with its predecessor. And at night after a hard day's work on the sets she must sit down and transcribe on her typewriter the whole of the day's doings. Now and again, if the director feels playfully inclined, she may have to sit on his knee and soothe the awakening *libido* with a nonchalant acceptance of his caresses.

Nor can the importance of the orchestra be overlooked—the dramatic violinist, the spider-like 'cellist, and the organist, with his instantly packable fifty-seven-pound organ like a big suit-case. These are the men who have the task of turning on passion's tap, hot or cold as necessity demands. If there is a fight the music shrills faster and faster, exciting the

## Hollywood—The Band of Hope

combatants and adding zest to the director's megaphonic urgency. Or if tears are needed the violin must sob out a theme more potent than Spanish onions. Yet in the choice of his tune tact is necessary. He must fit his music to temperament. Though excitement, anger, lust, or the more brutal passions find many a suitable melody for *obbligato* the gentler emotions may need a more subtle adjustment; not every nature can be stimulated to the most refined heights of love by the strains of *O Baby Mine*, nor will the lachrymal glands always excrete in response to *Good-bye, Honey, Good-bye*. Luckily, few of the stars seem to be gifted with ironic natures, and in general lachrymal music is lachrymal music all Hollywood over. But what has happened to these harmonic poltergeists under the *régime* of the movietone? Worse than that of flopped directors must their fate be, spun by reckless progress from the close comradeship of the studio and the profession into the dollarless void.



IF YOU HAVE TEARS . . . .

## Chapter XV

### LOS ANGELES—RELIGIONS

THE inhabitant of Los Angeles, though boasting of his climate, took little advantage of it. Very few of the lower middle classes—who made up, of course, the greater part of the city—could have travelled as far as the ocean more than once a month. Otherwise, what bathing-beaches the clubs had left to the public would have been totally congested. Our landlord, for instance, perhaps drove complacently to the beach whenever he had a distant visitor to whom he could boast of the ocean. Nor did the people take much advantage of the climate to make the town a delight to the eye. Los Angeles has probably the best flower-growing climate in the world. Geraniums and bougainvilleas grow almost like weeds, but few Californians seem to have in the real sense a garden-spirit. Under certain circumstances they might hire a man to dig for them, but to dig for themselves as an amusement, to dig and tend for the creation of a private and public beauty, hardly enters their minds.

At Bremen, on our way home from a German steamship line, we discovered an odd paradox that in some ways touches a secret of American character. There we found a house dedicated to "the five lazy men of Bremen." The first was too lazy to fetch his water from the river each day, so he dug a well; the second was so lazy he became tired of pulling his animals out of the holes in the road: he invented a pavement; the third wearied of cleaning up his house after each flood: he invented the dyke . . . and so on. Americans have that kind of laziness, the expenditure of concentrated effort to gain subsequent ease. Work, raw work,

## *Los Angeles—Religions*

the work that gives exercise to the body, they hold as derogatory and delegate to the unlettered emigrant or the negro. Hence, perhaps, comes the tremendous forward stride, the pre-eminence of the Jew in America and the consequent jealous dislike of him. For the Jew is both intelligent and hard-working; he seizes upon all the American's ingenious labour-saving devices, and then works like a horse as well. . . . This however is a provocative digression.

The strange thing to us was that Los Angeles did not lie deep-bedded in flowers. Here and there some amateur horticulturist had spread a wealth of purple blossom over his roof; here and there great hedges of scarlet geranium delighted the eye, but, for the most part, green lawns with sprinklers and a few date- or fern-palms and yucca-plants were considered ornament enough; pushing a lawn-mower once a week and turning on the automatic sprinkler fully satisfied the owner's gardening instincts.

Our own court had a gardener to perform these necessary duties, but he cost little, for, being lodged in an empty bungalow and acting as caretaker of the other court, he worked off his indebtedness. He was in some ways a queer character. Sandy-haired, with white eyelashes and globular blue eyes, he was a passionate follower of the revivalist Aimee McPherson, a Foursquare Gospeller, and in the most curious way used to combine Biblical language and American slang in his discourse.

"Yes, Mrs Gordon," he would say to Jo; "I tell you that the wickedness of this here city mounteth up an offence to the Lord of Hosts, and one day He'll soak it good and proper. Look what He did at San Francisco, eh? And I tell them that the day cometh when He will appear with fire and brimstone, yea, and the earth shall quake and the mountains tremble; an' will you believe me they thinks I'm talking bunk! And I say that the evil this city doeth stinketh in

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

His nostrils, and He's about through with the bunch, and He'll sweep them into the fiery pit, and believe me they'll be hollering for water in them days, and He'll say: 'Nothing doing, yer unbelievers; that's what you get for drinking bootleg and breaking My commandments.' . . ."

Later, after we had acted our little day at the M.G.M., Jo brought back the coloured photograph of the make-up man disguised as Christ, or Warner's double in *The King of Kings*. His hands were lifted, his expression was Guido Reni at his most ecstatic, and a yellow halo encircled his head. I wrote underneath: "Oh, Hollywood, Hollywood!" and pinned it to the wall of our sitting-room. The gardener took this to be a promising sign of grace, and at various times tempted us templeward.

"Say, Mr Gordon," he ejaculated one day, "you oughta 've been with us last night in the five-hundred room! Oh, the power blessed us in a way that showed the Holy Ghost itself was descending. It was fair tearing the tongues out of us. There was one of us there took the Bible, an' he was just buzzing over the pages and proclaiming in seven different tongues, he was. And another, he got the baptism of the spirit so sudden and strong that he fell under the piano."

Another time he said:

"Oh, glory, Mr Gordon, the power in the temple was that strong it was running down the walls. There was an old woman of ninety-three got converted, and jumped up in her seat hollering like she was killed, and another man saw the Lord in person standing right at the back of the furthest gallery. Can you beat that?"

"Sure, Mr Gordon," he said, "God has poured out his blessings wonderfully on the Americans and English; why, we send out more missionaries than all the rest of the world put together."

One of the paper touts, an old man who confessed to

## *Los Angeles—Religions*

having been an Oklahoma boomer in his unregenerate days, had also been converted, or, as he put it :

“ I was from Missouri, an’ you got to show it to me. So I says : ‘ Oh, Lord, if there is a God, you got to show me first,’ an’ the answer come right back like a streak over my brain.”

I rallied him about peddling the papers which were full of scandals, divorces, and sexual murders. But he was impervious to argument : the newspapers were sacrosanct, an American institution ; there was certainly no law against the papers, while there was a law against every wicked thing. At least, there wasn’t a law against smoking cigarettes yet, but there soon would be.

. . . . .

Mrs Aimee Semple McPherson, sole proprietor of the Foursquare Gospel method of reaching heaven, is one of the phenomena of Los Angeles. She can best be summed up by saying that for everyday affairs of life she wears bobbed hair, but in the presence of the Lord she wears a wig. Her church, which was the centre of our gardener’s interests, was a large concrete building, shaped like a theatre, from the top of which projected an erection like a lighthouse and the standards of a wireless transmitter. In the lighthouse were professional interceders, praying night and day to order ; the fee for special prayers from the lighthouse being, we understood, about one pound for a quarter of an hour. The wireless transmitter was notorious, and of such power that it sometimes drowned all the radio emissions, suddenly interrupting concert, speech, or dance music with such blatant religious exclamations or mere incoherent static that it had finally to be abated as a public nuisance.

. . . . .

Going into Aimee’s temple on Sunday night made us remember going into the bull-ring. Similar unadorned concrete

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

staircases poured humanity upward, where we came into a raw concrete theatre with deep galleries. So crowded already was the temple that we should have had difficulty in finding seats had not Jo told a superior attendant that we were writers and would probably give the temple 'publicity,' which at once smoothed out all our difficulties. We were reminded of the story of a journalist at a similar meeting. "Brother," muttered one of the attendants in his ear, "are you saved?"

"Press," said the journalist.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon," replied the revivalist.

The stage was set with a backcloth representing cotton-fields and half of a log cabin, before which the revivalist herself sat, dressed in a wide blue crinoline and a bonnet with cornflowers. Across the proscenium was ranged an orchestra dominated by the heavy mouth of an enormous souzaphone, like some glittering Æolus cave of melody. Between the orchestra and the revivalist a negro quartette dressed as cotton-pickers were bawling into a microphone on a tall stand which was connected immediately over their heads to six trumpets—rent, as it were, from their appropriate cherubim—and fixed to a loud-speaker. These trumpets gathered up the voices and flung them about the chapel, competing even with the blares of the souzaphone:

I tell you once,  
O yess !  
I tell you twice,  
Yess, Lord !  
There's sinners in hell  
Fo' shootin' dice,  
Sho' dey is.

Didn' hear nobody pray,  
Didn' hear nobody pray,  
Down in de lan' by ma own self,  
Didn' hear nobody pray.

## Los Angeles—Religions

The spirituals over, the revivalist hastily rose from her lax attitude, pushed the quartette into one corner, and, with every evidence that she was capable of getting the last ounce of feminine appeal from a crinoline, moved before the microphone and adjusted it with a deft and long-practised hand. At once the trumpets aloft began to blare :

“ This is the Glory Station of Radioland speaking. Now first of all I want everybody to stand up ; shake two of your neighbours by the hand and say : ‘ Bless you.’ ”

The little white-haired woman on my right sprang at me and blessed me ecstatically ; a hard finger was probed into the middle of my back, and turning I found my hand at once embedded in a huge fist like that of a butcher. “ Bless you, bless you, brother ! ” said a voice that made me think of suet. By Jo’s side was a severely practical woman who blessed her in a business-like way.

“ This is the Glory Station of Radioland speaking, O Lord,” shouted the trumpets again, “ and this is Angelus Temple filled with happy people, filled *so* full, O Lord, that they are even crowding the aisles and can’t get seats. O Lord, this is indeed a splendid sight for the glory of Thy name. Now first we will have our subject sermon. Slavery days, yes, O Lord, slavery days. Mamie Jennings will take her place on the block and be sold by the wicked overseer, after which she will recite *Ah didn’t know what to do* and *Belindy’s Wedding*. Slavery days, O Lord. And we then have one hundred and thirty-four to baptize to the glory of Thy name. Yes, the Glory Station of Radioland speaking. Now comes the slave sale as it used to be in the terrible old days. Slavery days. O my brethren, if any of you are still in the slavery of sin let me set you free. . . . ”

She turned from the microphone to the audience, nodded her head brightly like an experienced nurse encouraging a

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

timid child, and exclaimed in a curiously matter-of-fact voice :

“ Praise God ! ”

The audience shot out their right arms like a file of rifles levelled at heaven, and the volley snapped back, followed by a round of independent sniping :

“ Praise God ! ”

At my side the white-haired woman had levelled her arm, had added the reduced charge of her voice to the general salute. As we resumed our seats she murmured to me in an undertone :

“ You here las' Thursday ? ”

“ No,” I said.

“ Y'art a been. Oh, it was a wonderful revelation. Wonderful ! I don't know whenever I felt so much power falling. You might say it was fair streaming down the walls. An' the sick came in their wheeled chairs, on their crutches, and Sister was healing them as fast as they could be brought in. Oh, the Holy Ghost Himself was surely here helping in. And one lame man threw down his crutch so hard it made a dent in the pavement. Why, you may hardly believe me, but on that afternoon the power was so strong that a man in the top back row of the upper balcony was converted. Yes, he stood right up and proclaimed himself and testified. Oh, the power was marvellous ! ”

Meanwhile on Jo's left the business-like woman was telling her :

“ Yes, I'm organizing secretary for the Alexander revivals, and I tell you I come right down here to Los Angeles to study Aimee's methods. We don't know how she does it. She uses up an awful lot of money, but she also brings in an awful lot of souls to God. To look at her now you'd say there was nothing to her, but we who are in the business, we know. She's a powerful organizer, and I tell you it's

## *Los Angeles—Religions*

the organization counts. There's nobody else in Los when Mrs McPherson is about, let me tell you that. . . ."

Meanwhile, below on the stage a clumsy dumb-crambo had been enacted. A negro girl in a pink cotton frock, an overseer in a ruffianly beard, as if from a comic film, and two evangelists thinly disguised as Southern gentlemen, carried out an ill-acted slave sale, interrupted by a fourth evangelist, supposed to represent Abraham Lincoln, who mounted a rostrum, and while the three slaving scoundrels shrank from his presence shouted :

" I proclaim all the slaves free ! "

During this pantomime Aimee had been seated carrying on an animated conversation over a portable telephone. Now she sprang to her feet and, gripping the microphone, shouted :

" And I proclaim all sinners free if they will only believe. Praise God ! "

The levelled arms were presented.

" Praise God ! " riposted the audience.

" Now the main floor only," cried Aimee.

" Praise God ! "

" Now the first balcony."

" Praise God ! "

" Now the upper balcony."

Evidently the conversion of the sinner in this balcony had been, as my old neighbour said, something of a miracle. Compared with the stalls and dress circle, the gallery was faint-hearted, a place of scepticism and curiosity. To achieve a convert in the outermost circle testified to unusual power.

" There's a countryman of yours preaching here yesterday an' to-morrer," whispered the old woman, " but he don't wield the power. Why, he wrestled with the sinners for a full half an hour, and in the end all he got was two converts. Two ! "

She uttered this wretched sum with undisguised contempt.

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

"When Sister gets after them she brings them into the fold by hundreds. Only this afternoon she had the platform there just packed with sinners. . . . Yes, sir, I'm telling you. . . .

"Why," she went on, "Sister's got over a hundred an' thirty to baptize this very evening. You kin see them all sittin' down there below. The women in white on the one side and the men on the other. . . ."

We were seated rather deeply in the middle of the dress circle. Above our heads the concrete floor of the gallery sloped down, supported by large pillars of concrete; in the distance our vision of the stage was framed in concrete, the band, the banks of flowers, the pantomime scene, and overhead a banked choir of lovely girls. On either side of us lines of faces curved round, all concentrated on the spectacle below, where the revivalist in the crinoline, gleaming in the concentrated beams of the spot-lights, was preaching.

The faces lined out were in many features curiously of a mould. Nearly three-quarters were past middle age, and of these a very large number were marked by length of nose, shortness of upper lip, and prominence of chin, heavy eyebrow prominences with scanty eyebrows, and thin-lipped mouths turning decisively downward at the corners bound firmly to the nose-wings by deep gashes. The faces bore a general look as though the lip corners in their expression of unrelenting disapproval had drawn the whole face into a sagging harmony. There were faces baked by the summers or frozen by the winters on the great Middle Western plains, yet faces capable of flashing and unusual gaiety on occasion. A strange congregation in a strange place of worship with a strange preacher in a strange town.

"Y'art to come here Sat'dy night," whispered the old woman at my side. "We're sure going to have the most wonderful wedding—you can see her down below if you

## *Los Angeles—Religions*

peek—third along in the front row. That's Eliza Creechy, that is."

She looked hopefully at my face to enjoy my amazement, but I was a stranger and ignorant.

"Why," she cried reproachfully, "she was queen of the underworld, she was. Been in the penitentiary lots of times. Dope fiend. She wuz carried here on a stretcher from Los Angeles Gaol, and Sister put the power on to her. She testifies that when she was converted she was so full of needle-pricks that she couldn't hardly find a new place to put a needle into; 'jections, see. Oh, it will be a glorious ceremony, and a flashlight photo, too. You'll have to get here early if you want a seat."

. . . . .

The old revivalist had to be leather-lunged. He dominated his assemblies by the mesmerism of his eye and the impact of his projected personality. He loomed from the pulpit and plucked the weakening sinners from the unleavened mass. At first mere camp-meetings for religious service among the pioneers who had no permanent clergyman in their entire district, the thing grew by stages from the ferocious hell-fire beginnings of Edwards, Pommeroy, and Tucker, to the finally organized conversion campaigns of Billy Sunday and Aimee McPherson. In the old camp-meeting physical excitement was raised to a pitch which under ill-lit conditions did not always redound to the glory of God—physical as well as spiritual excesses stamped them, in spite of the preachers' lurid pictures of hell and damnation. Still, on a certain type of American upbringing and mentality the old revivalism has left its mark; it has provided a supposedly glorious outlet for those impulses of humanity toward distractions such as the theatre, the dance, and even sexual adventure. The Los Angeles Temple, seen with aloof eyes, is little more than a

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

translation of the Hollywood booze-party into other terms. In fact, one witty American reviewer coupled together Aimee's book, *In the Service of the Lord*, with Isadora Duncan's *My Life*, and dexterously drew out their parallelisms.

The reasons for both revivalism and booze-parties lie in the comparatively resourceless nature of the modern mind, in its lack of interests beyond business and its lack of hobbies. The folk-spirit, that inner stimulus urging even the ordinary man toward creative impulses in his spare time, seems to be almost completely wanting. Few pursue any quiet personal task careless of reward; there is little gardening, little music, except of a professional or sexually exhibitional nature, no home carving—fretwork or construction. In a Middle Western swindler's office thousands of letters from victims were found all complaining of the unrelieved monotony of their lives. And, as a cure or a change, whether the victim goes to the Lord or whether he goes to the devil seems a matter of pure chance and the influences among which he falls.

The modern revivalist, like the old, is supplying a long-felt want, but he is also modern in his methods. He has no more use for leather lungs, in spite of the Reverend Billy Sunday, ex-pugilist, who tears souls from their lethargy by every physical violence possible to a preacher. For Aimee, with her woman's voice, easily outbrays him, assisted by her voltage and amplifiers. Her voice blares from a cluster of trumpets, and she preaches not only to the comparatively small concentration of souls in her Temple, but to the vibrant ether. She converts not only the sinner but the microphone itself, and a hundred, two hundred miles away, in San Francisco, or on the arid plains of New Mexico, her disembodied voice is struggling with sin wherever the sinner has got his aerial tangled in the proper wave-length. The massed trumpets lent a clarion note to the sermon, caricaturing the preacher's voice, though not disguising its odd person-

## Los Angeles—Religions

ality, a kind of dualism, half raw masculine, half sentimental feminine, crying the wares of God in the ripe, husky tones of a street coster alternating with those of a complacent hospital nurse trying to reassure a patient previous to an operation.

Her sermons give the unctuous all the satisfaction of a good vaudeville show. Every Sunday she thinks out some



SISTER AIMEE BAPTIZES BY HUNDREDS

new device. On one occasion she rode into the Temple on a motor-bicycle, dressed as a 'road cop' in breeches and uniform. Springing from her machine, and thrusting it back on to its haunches, she held up her hand and cried :

"Stop! You are speeding to hell!"

The grand baptism was performed in a square tank recessed under the choir balcony. On *eau de nil* waters floated rose petals. At the back, lit by footlights, was a desert scene, presumably that of Jordan. Clad in white, with long sleeves to her wrists that, spread out, gave her the look of a calico archangel, Aimee on one side and an assistant on the other,

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

thigh-deep in the water, received and doused the white-robed converts in batches of three. The strength of the revivalist must have been extraordinary. Three converts stood together while Aimee and her assistant joined hands behind their back. The baptizers then seized the two outside converts by the nose and lowered the group bodily backward into the water, raising it again with the centre figure spluttering and snorting. The muscle necessary to lower and raise one hundred and thirty persons is not to be despised. Now the use of Aimee's long sleeves was perceptible; soaked cotton shows the figure, so over drenched women the veiling sleeve was quickly thrown. As the converts climbed from the tank a towel flapped from behind the scenes and drew them to dryness. As each convert stepped into the water his or her name was read aloud, but Aimee kept up a running comment :

"This man was an accordion player in the cabarets of wickedness; now he has found Glory. Praise the Lord!"

"This man was a Catholic. We have rescued a soul from the scarlet woman. Praise the Lord!"

A young man of some six feet three stepped into the tank.

"Say, folks, we'll have to fold this man up like a jack-knife to get him to Glory.

"This young man's mother is listening in up in San Francisco to hear him go to Glory. Now, don't you want to say a word to your dear old mother before you are saved? Bring the microphone up here."

The microphone was held to the young man's lips. He turned scarlet with confusion, stuttered, and finally roared out:

"Hullo, Mother!"

"Praise the Lord" and "Glory" beat the air during the whole ceremony, but at last the long procession of drenched figures finished, and the congregation in turn left the Temple.

## *Los Angeles—Religions*

“One hundred and thirty-three baptisms,” said the secretary of Alexander’s Missions. “Yes, I tell you it takes some organization to keep that going. But if one person can make a one-hundred-million-dollar Gospel Syndicate a success, Aimee is the woman.”

On a subsequent occasion we visited one of her healing services; although the crutches of the maimed and the bandages of the blind are freely exhibited as souvenirs, there are suspicious tales of prearranged cures of this kind. Epilepsy and stomach trouble are her favourite illnesses. Over one young man with the latter complaint she prayed with fervour for ten minutes; then she clapped him cheerfully on the back and cried:

“That job’s done. You’re cured.” Then, flinging her hand upward: “Thank yer, Jesus; pass along the next one, please.”

Such were the spiritual orgies in which our gardener and his family indulged themselves several nights a week. For Americans they were barebones poor, just having escaped the fate of the 80,000 workless in the city. Yet they owned an old car in which they transported their tools and drove to and from the meetings. However, the joys of the Foursquare Gospel seemed to be wearing thin. Even the superior excitements of the two and the five hundred rooms where the elect rose to pitches of religious animation higher than in the public temple must have been losing their grip, for one day he said to me :

“ Say, Mr Gordon, what do you think of these Holy Rollers? Don’t you think maybe they get into closer communication with the spirit even than Mrs McPherson? ”

Holy Rollering is the last lap of spiritual progression, but, unlike Aimee's demonstrations, Holy Rollering did not bulk very largely among the numerous freak religions of Los

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

Angeles, and we only discovered where it was practised after our departure. But the "House of God" described in *On Wandering Wheels* was a variety of the cult. Holy Rolling is an undistinguished and unhonourable cult, developed directly from the Shouting Methodists of Wesley and the early Shakers. It indulges in orgies of floor-grovellings and wallowings, crying out in unintelligible 'tongues,' rejoicing in miraculous cures, and immediate contact with the Holy Spirit.

But they wielded no such power in Los Angeles town as did Mrs McPherson, with her publicity, her worshippers, and her scandals. For under that high and much-curved wig in which the revivalist faced her Maker lay the bobbed hair of the merely worldly, and the scandals gathered thickly about Mrs McPherson's name. She had been accused of running off with her own wireless operator for a little holiday, of having faked a dramatic disappearance by drowning, and of having staged an equally dramatic escape from kidnapping bootleggers who had immured her in a hut lost in the deserts of New Mexico. She had been accused of bribing justice, of having been concerned in a fraudulent real estate promotion. She had quarrelled with her mother, "Ma Kennedy," over the finances of the Temple, and had only been reconciled when the latter was sued by a clergyman for 'heart balm,' or breach of promise to marry. But nothing could undermine her influence, neither the scandals nor, what seemed to us even more important, her blatantly business-like method of conducting the services of her Church.

She plays with a deliberate and practised touch on the sensibilities of her Middle Western audiences, stimulates their easy emotionalism to so-called religious fervour, and gives them the colour necessary in their drab existences. Thus the possibility of so extraordinary a power wielded by one so blatant and crude cannot be ignored when one tries to

## *Los Angeles—Religions*

view the psychology of America. Cultivated Americans deride her, but we must not forget that America's one hundred millions do not consist of cultivated persons—ninety-five millions or so belong to those ripe for the ministrations of Aimee and her like, and this ninety-five millions, who are steadily reducing life to the dreariest and most comfortable formula conceivable, have to take refuge in manifestations of this order. These are the ones with whom we have to reckon in considering the future effect of America on the world.

Yet when you have finished with the Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Foursquare Gospellers, Holy Rollers, Seventh-day Adventists, Christian Scientists, Salvationists, Jews, Theosophists, Voodooists, spiritualists, Moslems, Bak-ta-sheeists, exotic Indian sects, Buddhists, Taoists, Zoroastrians, and atheists, you have not finished with the ramifications of Los Angeles' religious aspect. The American religious impulse takes on other social aspects in which any free-thinking is a heresy suppressible by personal violence. The ancient saints' days of Catholic times have been replaced by equally sacred occasions: on such-and-such a day you must honour your mother (if you do this religiously you may apparently forget her for the rest of the year); on another day you must honour your father (even though you and he may have quarrelled like two dogs and can't bear the sight of one another). On such a day you must put off your derby or fedora and don a straw hat; on such another day you must take your straw hat off or it will be torn from your head and ground to pulp beneath the heels of the indignant populace. Birth-controllers and non-birth-controllers hate one another as viciously as the Huguenots and the Catholics; companionate marriagers and non-companionate marriagers, as the Cavaliers and Round-heads; alcoholists and anti-saloon leaguers, cigarette-smokers and chewing-gum fiends, modern writers and purity watch-

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

committees, Sunday car drivers and Lord's Day resters, police and trades unionists ; any of these sects would willingly stage lynching-parties for the other without remorse.

Nobody can let anybody else alone ; there is no live and let live ; only the mass movement is permitted, an individual opinion, an individual method of behaviour, being a crime against gregariousness. The revivalist yelled at you as you passed : "Are you saved?" The birth-controller pushed you into a corner and hammered you with statistics.

This passionate impulse of gratuitously interfering in every one else's business, which is responsible for most of America's purity laws, prohibitions, missionary societies, straw-hat riots, and lynchings, broke out during our stay as a comparatively mild excitement over *Mother India*. The fact that the book was written by an American vouched for its integrity. England, whose policy in India had hitherto been looked upon as a monstrous crime of hypocrisy, autocracy, and slavery, changed in a moment from a scoundrelly nation to one almost sanctified. The Indians were suddenly exposed for what they were. Women revelled in the crude details of juvenile marriage, and left the book lying about the house for the children to read on the sly. Indian teachers of mystic cults who had been reaping generous harvests found their flocks falling rapidly from them and organized in vain anti-Mother-Indian demonstrations.

On the effect of this one book English popularity ran high in Los Angeles until an unfortunate occurrence gave public opinion a right-about-face. We have already referred to three separate English celebrities who, travelling unofficially, refused to throw off their incognito, repudiating civic welcomes, dinners with the Chamber of Commerce, banquets by the Daughters of the Revolution, and speeches by the Rotary Clubs. The damage, *pro tem.*, to British trade was severe, but also in a trice all the good work done by *Mother*

## Los Angeles—Religions

*India* was wiped out. Uplifters and Righteous, as well as Commercial, turned their backs on England ; Mahatmas crept out once more into the sunlight of publicity. On such slight bases do friendly relations stand.

Active war, except on such occasions as straw-hat day, was however restricted by the police, who did not allow any other sect to usurp the privilege of physical brutality which they exercised with cheerful goodwill wherever they found the mildest example of trade unionism, communism, I.W.W.ism, or any other suspicion of workers' organization societies. In a supposedly free country honest but idealistic men were arrested without warrants, were shut *incommunicado* in gaol ; their rooms were ransacked, their papers confiscated or destroyed, and they themselves not seldom tortured with the third degree. Meanwhile well-known bandits, pimps, and bootleggers lived in comparative security.

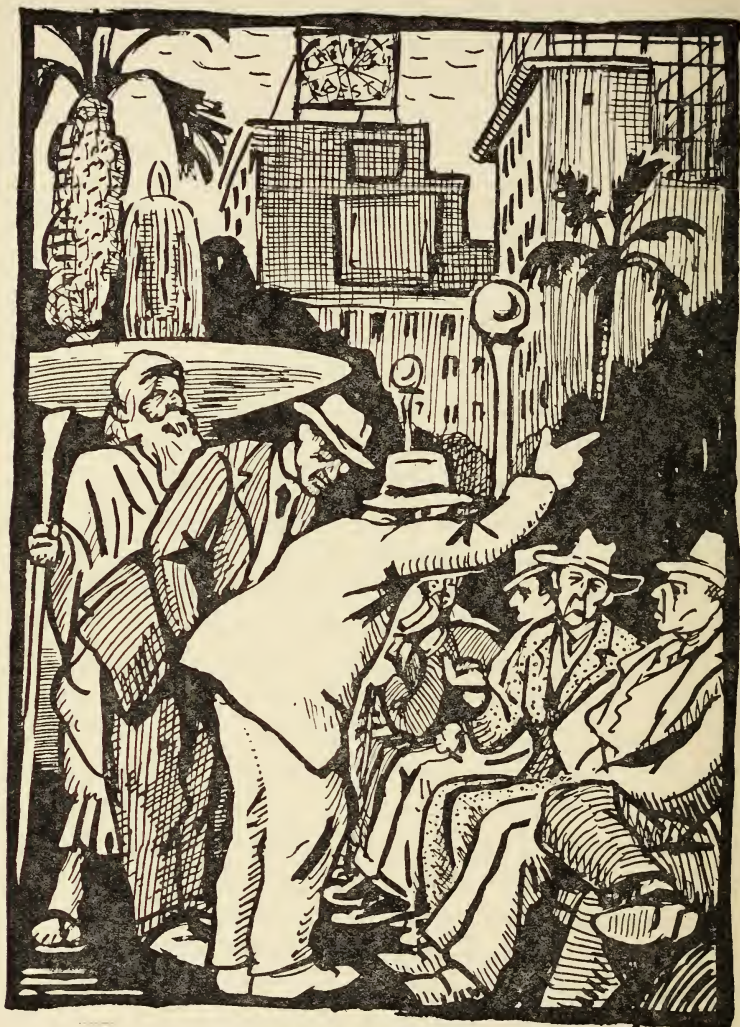
On the night we saw Aimee healing the sick I was seated by a thickset, roughly dressed man.

"See that!" he growled, as the corridors and gangways became filled with people unable to find seats. "That's against city regulations, that is. It's a danger in case of accidents. If Bob Schuyler had one man standing in his alley-ways the police would run him in. Yes, sir ; and soak him good and proper. He criticizes the City Hall like the man he is, so they're always trying to catch him on the trip. But Aimee here has a good graft with the mayor and company. The police don't dare touch her, I tell ya."

The City Hall, we were told, symbolized the three outstanding features of Los Angeles : the solid base stood for the firm foundations at the strategic point of the great south-west ; the flanking wings exemplified the city's marvellous growth from the original *pueblo* ; while the soaring tower symbolized the indomitable spirit of its citizens. Behind this City Hall lay the Plaza. It was the old Mexican centre

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

of the city, flanked on the one side by Chinese stores, which at night often breathed out weird and thrilling Celestial



THE IDEALISTS OF PERSHING PARK

melodies, on the other by the old church of Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles and a movie theatre, in which during the

## *Los Angeles—Religions*

interlude Mexican plays were given. Here during the week Mexicans, Chinamen, some Japanese, and a few Americans who appreciated the vagabond life, lounged in the warm air under the shadow of the trees. But on Sunday it became the Los Angeles substitute for Hyde Park. Preachers of all kinds clustered along its pavements. Strange religions and strange nationalities contrasted, Mexican revivalists, Japanese revivalists, and negro revivalists, Baptists, Catholics, a strange white-whiskered old negro with an eye-shield, brandishing a Zoroastrian chart, atheists, debunkers. . . . A shouting, exhorting, blaspheming, crazy crowd, crazier even than the Holy Rollers. As in Hyde Park, they could say almost what they liked as long as they did not touch on one subject—labour. If one speaker among the 80,000 workless men dared to stand up and proclaim his sense of wrong the police fell on him at once, and he was rushed off to gaol.

In the central square of Pershing Park the old idealists held daily meetings. Here one could view the strange ancestors of the city, bent, withered, whiskered, bearded, hatted like Southern gentlemen of past days, one even in a toga and sandals, the old idealists disputed interminably in the sun. The poorer searched the big paper-bins for the newspapers that the richer threw away. But this pleonasm of talk did not please the police, and one day they arrested the whole squareful, and carried them all to gaol, whence they had to be rescued by the Civil Liberties Association. There is little doubt that, from the point of view of a benighted European, this living in a land which spells Liberty with a capital L has its drawbacks.

## *Chapter XVI*

### HOLLYWOOD—THE MADNESS OF MOVIE-TONE

WE had brought an introduction to a supervisor of supervisors, one of the highest ranks possible to a man not a gold-plated magnate. He invited us to lunch and, leaning toward us over the salad with an attitude of secret confidence, said impressively :

“ I’m now going to tell you what is wrong with the movies.”

At that moment an almost equally important star came into the restaurant, and the explanation was temporarily postponed.

We dined with Sam Ornitz, and at the subsequent party a supervisor, rather less important, coaxed me into a corner. Waving his glass of whisky and ginger ale before my face, he said impressively :

“ I’m going to tell you what is wrong with the movies.”

But an ambitious young woman cut him from under my guns, and the analysis of movie decadence was left untold.

We watched the university professor, dressed as a forty-niner, careering drunkenly about in a Wild West saloon. He came from the set, and, crouching before me in an almost menacing manner—the six-shooter illusion still haunting him off the stage—he growled :

“ I’ll tell you now what is wrong with the movies.”

But the whistle called him off once more to caper under the Kleigs and suns.

In fact, the whole of Hollywood seemed to be almost unanimously of opinion that the movies were sick. Stars still received £2000 and £3000 a week. Directors still turned

## *Hollywood—The Madness of Movietone*

nine or ten reels of ribbon, throwing the surplus away, when they only wanted seven at the utmost. Technical experts were still brought from Europe at fabulous salaries to be held mute prisoners on the lots. Authors were still imported on trial from New York, although their published works showed no real aptitude for the films. Hollywood, in fact, continued to waste money in a way that no other industry in the world has ever wasted money, and to pay salaries that no other industry has ever paid.

Yet . . . everybody was agreed on the sickness of the movies. Why, if things continued thus Mr Irving Thalberg would be reduced to practical starvation, with not more than £80,000, instead of £150,000, a year. The movies were sick. What magician could discover the cure?

The dire nature of the sickness was proved by a slowing of the pulse, the said pulse being the box-office receipts. Technique was improving all the time, photography was better every day, the stories were the same as last year—yet slowly the public interest was waning. What could be wrong with the movies?

To Europeans one of the most striking features of the American outlook is its peculiar optimism. As long as the sun is shining all possibility of a rainy day must be banished from the mind, so that it becomes a positive indecency and an insult to carry an umbrella. No period of good fortune can possibly be followed by a slump.

This is illustrated by the automobile trade. Ever since the introduction of the Ford car, many years ago, the sale of cars in America has been leaping ahead by bounds. The tremendous popularity of one cheap car induced a normal crop of imitators. Cars became an essential factor in American life. Nevertheless a period of some twenty years was needed not only to spread a sense of the car's necessity, but to break down completely the conservatism of the poorer classes.

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

However, the continual cheapening of the umpteenth-hand car brought prices so low that even tramps no longer deign to use boot-leather, and Los Angeles, which boasts of being the most car-saturated city in the States, owns one car to every two and a half inhabitants, including infants in arms.

When we ourselves decided to leave the town we looked for a purchaser of our old Franklin. The grizzled keeper of the parking-ground before the Paramount studios had long taken a kindly interest in us as foreigners, and he promised to find somebody. At last he brought to us a stripling of waxy complexion whom conversation revealed to be the second cook in one of the wood and chicken-wire shacks that sold hot-dogs and lemonade in front of the extras' exit. The young cook was rather diffident, for, as he told us :

" You see, it's this way . . . there's my wife and there's me, see? Now we gotta purty nice car, but nachurally when one of us is using it that other can't be at the same time, see? Well, the fact is, as you'll see in the *Sat'd'y Morning Post*, every family nachurally has to have two cars, see? I only got about twenty-five dollars in the world, and I was thinking of getting me an old Ford, so's I could come to work on it and leave it about, while the wife drives round shopping on the other one we got, see? This yer car's a bit better than I was counting on, see? But if you're willing to take twenty-five bucks for it, why, then, they're yours. If it looks right to you I'm all right too. 'Cause, as I explained, you simply can't live in this city if you don't have two cars ; that's all there is to it. . . ."

We may judge that, when the assistant cooks of wayside shacks have to keep their families up to a two-car standard, car-saturation in Los Angeles must almost have reached its limit. Up to now one might almost say that the swallowing of cars by the States has been the results of natural appetite,

## *Hollywood—The Madness of Movietone*

stimulated, no doubt, by the Worcester Sauce of advertisement. But from the moment of complete saturation it will become much more like the stuffing process by which geese produce *pâté de foie gras*. Only so many cars can be properly pushed in at the upper layers of society in proportion as others are excreted by the lower. In fact, already a glut of unsold cars has caused a serious stoppage of the car-digestive tracts of the country.

Yet, with their factories at full blast, manufacturers were clamouring for greater and greater sales. A similar reasoning was rampant in every branch of commerce. More and more products were being forced on to the public by spendthrift maxims, by gradual-payment systems, and by advertisement. The golden age was predicted for the very near future. The slump now grinding the country, a slump not only inevitable, but to the least perspicacious eye already overdue, is the natural result. But two years ago one would have almost been assassinated had one dared to suggest the danger.

The slump that was affecting the movies was of a different, though of an allied, nature.

The mind of the everyday American is in some ways a novel phenomenon. It is a mind that is being bred with very few internal resources, and with a blank background instead of the old unconscious folk-lore tradition. America is concentrated on success. The boy or girl goes to school and college with the main idea of securing thereby a better place in business. Success in its most materialistic shape has been elevated into the position of religion, and, with cleanliness, has long superseded godliness. In wider matters the popular outlook is local and incurious. Its farther resources are the newspaper—grotesquely filled with grotesque crimes—the car, bootleg, and the movies. Boys and girls are concentrated on their own physique, on vanity, and on sexual curiosity to an almost unbelievable extent. There is little interest in art,

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

and no time for reading other than the Yellow Press. In the family one seldom hears a discussion about abstract subjects except among the professionally intelligent. On one occasion we almost compelled a well-to-do Chicago man and his wife to remain at home by their own fireside and talk for an evening. They confessed that they had never tried the experiment before, but found it quite enjoyable. Nevertheless this comment is not really concerned with the better-educated, but with the general mass of the people. In our Los Angeles bungalow court I do not believe that one book was bought by one of the inhabitants during the whole of our six-months stay. Out of the twelve bungalows not a person except ourselves used the excellent local free library, a five-minutes walk away. One contributing reason may be that, owing to the polyglot quality of antecedents, no desire to entertain itself by reading has been handed down, and all sense of art inherited from folk-tradition, either of a poetical, narrative, or decorative kind, has vanished in the melting-pot. The loud-speaker is now turned on at eight in the morning and continues to bawl uninterruptedly until midnight, so that the housewife shall never be cursed with a moment of silence in which she must think. The wireless, the car, and the movies have become three insidious drugs, moral morphias that can render *habitués* insensible to any vacant spaces of mental life unfilled with thought.

The movies' first overpowering success was no doubt due to the fact that they, first of these three popular anodynes, became cheap enough to be enjoyed by all. When movies were launched their only rival was the saloon. Prohibition was a strong factor in movie success, since national organization of smuggling and illicit distilling required time to reach its present perfection. Cars have approached saturation-point only in recent years; so that during the War movies had an almost undisturbed position. They were cheap, they

## *Hollywood—The Madness of Movietone*

were in every community, and they were a complete mental anæsthesia. . . . So they boomed.

The car's wide popularity among all classes, the invention of wireless, bootleg liquor, and the growth of flagrant and cynical concupiscence among youth are all factors in the deposing of the movies as a prime drug of the unthinking classes, although no doubt the movies themselves, with their darkened halls and their sex-stimulating subjects, encouraged the last-named rival. But there were other and internal factors. Technical improvements of the silent film had just reached a point from which further developments would have been most interesting, although of a nature probably too subtle for the ordinary spectator. Outpouring movie plots—a waste almost as reckless as that of natural oil resources—combined with restrictions of concealed censorship by the sheriff's office, the clergy, and sentimental optimism, brought an exhaustion of idea and consequent repetition or banality. Further, the movies are rather silent as a spectacle; apart from what happens unseen in the dark, they are almost discreet. Modern youth demands noise to span its nerves to an ever-increasing pitch of hysteria.

Owing to exceptional opportunities, the movies have for many years held a position out of all true comparison with their intrinsic value. For a time they could carry on by the impulse of inertia. But with their novelty dead and their inertia lost they were threatening to sink to their legitimate position.

This failure of intrinsic interest was confessed by the magnificence of such movie theatres as Roxy's or the Paramount in New York, or Graumann's in Hollywood itself. It was confessed by the spectacles called 'prologues,' in which the visibly human was called to assist. Spectacles and music-hall turns were used as interludes. But the only result of the human actors, poor and vulgar as their shows might be, was

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

to exhibit the movies as an even thinner kind of exhibition by contrast. They proved clearly that the real function of an everyday film is to offer a cheap, restful, and innocuous drug to lethargic and work-tired masses.

But the function of providing cheap drugs to tired masses would not support magnates, supervisors, stars, directors, camera-men, and authors at their inflated salaries.

So the sick movies were wildly seeking for any road by which they might recapture novelty and thus climb back to the position they had lost. Directors such as Lubitsch, Murnau, Vidor, or Von Sternberg were trying to push technique to higher realms of artistic expression. Authors like Ornitz were struggling for greater honesty of expression. Colour had been tried with little success. Suddenly the movietone appeared, and the capitalists cried with a unanimous voice: "We are saved."

Clearly they were saved. Why, queues of people waited for hours to see Warners' first 100-per-cent. talking-film. At a bound movies had recaptured novelty and, with novelty, the uncritical interest of a great American public. In consequence every big movie lot clamoured with a fury of building. Cement-mixers clattered day and night compounding material for deep foundations of pure concrete that should isolate the apparatus from all earthy tremors; forests of iron wires sprouted, the backbones of thick, reinforced walls; millions of capital were being flung back into the movies' last hope: huge sound-proof studios in which, once completed, you might shut yourself away and find there the very silence of the dead itself.

But, though magnates and supervisors might chant pæns of relief, there was no such rejoicing among the other branches of the industry. Stars, directors, and even the Milky Way were inclined to believe that the cure was almost worse than the disease. Charlie Chaplin, the one actor whose position

## Hollywood—The Madness of Movietone

in the silent film was almost impregnable, fulminated against the movietone and swore never to make a speaking-film, though he did allow a possible utility in little *obbligatos* of noise. Vidor, Murnau, Lubitsch, Von Sternberg, and such directors as had been steadily developing film possibilities as



A FURY OF BUILDING

æsthetic movement related to emotional events, saw before them the ruin of their carefully and patiently studied technique, to which was added the terror of wholly new and untried problems. Stars, imported from Europe and enjoying fabulous contracts, became aware that their hitherto uncouth linguistic experiments would hardly pass as competent dialogue; while stars, even of pure American birth, must have been declaiming to their wives in the privacy of their bedrooms and wondering what the microphone would think of their often uncultured accents. Acrobats suddenly saw

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

their values moving from their legs to their throats. Ex-sailors or farmers saw themselves for ever cut off from posing as millionaires in the future even if they kept their jobs. Who knew whether California, Kansas, Louisiana, or New York might not become accent-conscious and demand that their films should be produced by native sons? The North and South might come again into conflict. And England, of course, would be asking for its own mincing vowels. Over the stars a nightmare of the microphone loomed like a critical and implacable ear. As for the extras, the twenty thousand hopeful, they could but see in those great sound-proof walls that mounted slowly before their eyes the death of the great spectacular scene and the banishment from film production of surging crowds such as gave them the more stable part of their meagre pittance.

More authors were hurried from New York — young dramatists who, for £60 a week, were set to write dialogues and conversations that should be fitted into stories already continuized or for films that were already in the process of being 'shot.' This was called 'dubbing.' Continuity-men began to shiver in their shoes to think that in the near future they would have to write their literary hash a correct length; for it was clear to the meanest intelligence that, no matter how one might cut a silent film from twelve reels down to seven, no such scissors legerdemain could be practised with the dialogue printed in light waves along the edge of the film itself.

Hollywood was a strange mixture of jubilation and dismay.

The early secrets of movietone were zealously guarded. Here again, as in the case of Charlie Chaplin, we could feel hopeful, since, with their usual spendthrift haste, the studio had imported from New York a prominent theatrical producer at a snug salary some six months before his services could be utilized. He had little to do except to draw his pay,

## *Hollywood—The Madness of Movietone*

loit on the lots studying movie technique, or gossip with all comers. With him, as with most of the imported ones, we found bonds of sympathy and mutual friends.

His task was beset with obstacles. The man who had cornered control of all movietone mechanism was jealous of his stage experience, and, fearing that Milton's craft would make his own appear thin, he contrived, as long as he was able, to keep the New Yorker from getting his apparatus and from developing his ideas. However, the latter had promised us the freedom of the stage as soon as he came into his own, so we watched the reinforced-concrete walls sprout with an interested anxiety.

Our sudden decision to return to Europe still found Robert Milton lacking a stage, and we had reluctantly decided that we must go without having seen any work in the movietone when accident did for us what design could not accomplish. Feeling grateful to Mr Dick for his unfailing helpfulness and good nature, and also for the numerous still-photographs that he allowed us to take away, I gave him a lithograph of Spain, a girl singing with peasant guitarists grouped about her. That day while we were at lunch the superior publicity man burst upon us.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "What is that picture you've given to Dick? I didn't know that you could do things like that."

"It is a lithograph," I explained, "drawn directly on to the stone, hand-printed, editions limited to thirty copies, and the stone afterward spoiled."

"I'm crazy about it," he said. "You don't know how it attracts me. Why, I've just offered Dick fifty dollars for it, but he won't sell. The fact is that my wife's birthday is soon, and I want to give her something different. Now, look here, have you got any more of those things? If so I'll buy one, or, if there is anything that I can do, if there is anything

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

you still want to see around the lot, why I'll get you into it."

"All right," I answered, "let us look in at a movietone production and the lithograph is yours."

"You mean that?" he cried, his eyes sparkling. "All right. Meet me to-morrow at eleven in the Publicity Department."

We refrained from putting what might have been a damper on his ardour by offering to sell him as many of my lithographs as he would take at two pounds apiece.

. . . . .

We had to wait a long time outside the movietone stage before a signal told the doorkeeper that the 'shooting' had come to a temporary halt. In the interval we were smuggled through the discreetly opened door. Even an everyday set hardly welcomes the intruder. He is a tolerated nuisance; the stars prefer his absence to his presence. They have become used to acting in a vacuum, and, far from stimulating them to higher flights, an audience hampers their ease of expression. It makes them self-conscious. But here, where the actors were still feeling nervous in experimenting with an almost untested technique, the atmosphere was charged with an amount of subconscious dislike that almost amounted to a smack in the face.

Feeling like very small mice in the presence of an annoyed cat, we hid ourselves in a darkened corner and tried to become as inconspicuous as possible. Jo, who had a slight cold, sucked a cough-lozenge with all her might and prayed for no preliminary warnings of a tickle in the throat. I became very conscious of my superfluous pounds and inches. However, the scene was just beginning, and there was no time for the actors to concert an objection to our presence.

Here was none of the bustle and jollity that ruled on the

## *Hollywood—The Madness of Movietone*

normal set. It seemed a ceremony almost religious, church-like in a sense of awe that oozed from the operators. I could never imagine the script-girl here perched on the director's knee. The influence of "Silence" seemed to have turned even the stage-hands into ghosts; the director spoke his instructions in a lowered voice, not a megaphone on the premises. The superior publicity gave us information under his breath.

No gay music burst out to stimulate the stars to an emotional brilliance; they must suck it all from their own entrails; the silence became so intense that we might almost have heard the music of the spheres instead; the yellow 'inkey' lights did not murmur with a cheerful sizzle; the 'juicers' stood frozen in rigid attitudes; not a joint creaked.

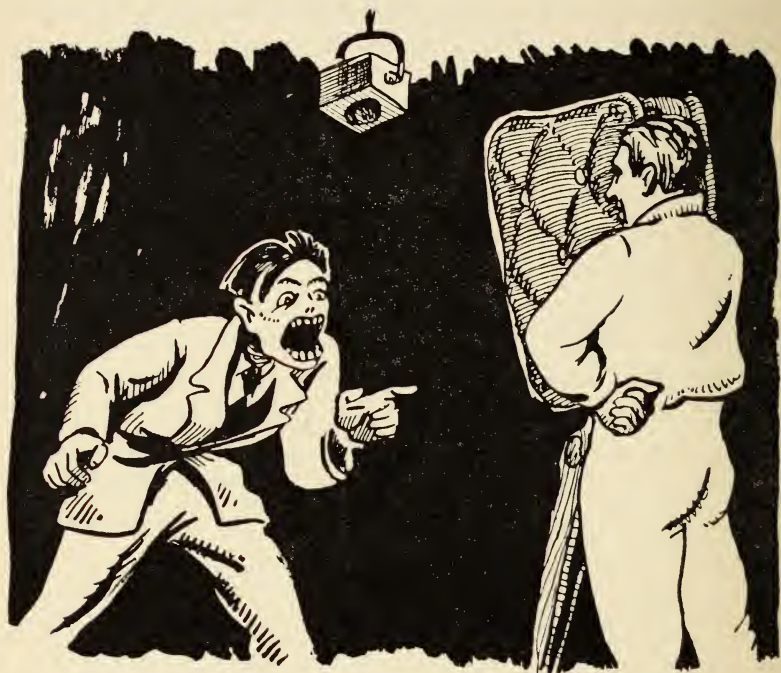
The star strode on to the set and began his speech, but suddenly the director holding up his hand cried: "Cut!" A faint, booming whirl pierced the roof and defied the sound-deadening curtains hung above. We waited as an aeroplane, all unconscious that its passage was costing the Paramount company a large sum in dollars, passed over and carried the noise of its engines into the untransmitting distance.

Once again the star strode into the 'inkey's' glare. The cameras, which were muffled in leather sound-proof mattresses as though they were just about to try for altitude records, watched him noiselessly. We were at first astonished at the quiet voice in which the actor spoke. But no voice production like that for the stage was necessary, here was no deep theatre to fill, no back seats that might make rude remarks on inaudibility. He had only to tickle the sensitive ear of the microphone which dangled over his head, from a gallows' arm just above the camera's vision. In a sound-proof gallery sat a man with earphones, the mixer, whose duty was to regulate the precise volume of voice recorded on the sound tract, for, under normal circumstances, as the star moved

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

about, coming nearer to or going away from the microphone, his speech would seem louder or weaker. These differences the mixer smoothed out by adjusting his amplifiers.

The scene was far longer than those used in the silent film. Here were no snippets of action mosaiced together, but a



EARLY TALKIES

The camera is in a padded waistcoat.

long patch of conversation, the words, indeed, more important than the action, which had become so simplified that we judged it might be boring to watch. The technique was as yet in its infancy. The magic of sound had overwhelmed the interest of movement. These first audiences went to hear the films, not to see them.

At the end of the scene our superior publicity muttered to us :

## *Hollywood—The Madness of Movietone*

“The actors are saying that you make them feel nervous. So I’m afraid we’ll have to quit. Still, you’ve seen all there is except the sound-recording apparatus itself, and I can’t show you that.”

As we left the building he told us, with the pride in mere expense that always moves Hollywood to worship :

“And, do you know, these sound films are going to cost us as high as a dollar for every word spoken.”

## Chapter XVII

### THE MOVIE-TONE IN FRANCE

WHEN we left Hollywood the talking-film was in its infancy. Warners' had been using a disc apparatus for some time, but the synchronization of speech and picture was sometimes imperfect, with comic results. In order to catch up with Warner all the other producers were 'dubbing' talkie tracts or sound effects into films whether the particular film was suited to talk or no.

In France a year later I was practically kidnapped into contact with the talking-films again. One evening a *pneumatique* asked me to call up a certain number.

"Hello, hello!" the answering voice replied. "Yes, this is C——; that you, Jan? . . . Are you free to-morrow? . . . Then meet me at the Bastille Station at 8.30 sharp. Most important. I'll explain afterwards."

Puzzling over the mystery of his message and over his refusal to give me any details, I set the alarum, and on its due operation next morning hurried into my clothes, found C—— waiting for me outside the station, was raced on to the platform and into a train before a hint of the expedition's objective could be got from him.

"Now then," I demanded, lighting my pipe, "what the dickens is all this about?"

"You are going to act in a talking-film," said C——.

"But, my dear chap," I protested, "I have never acted in a talking-film in my life."

"There you go arguing," said C——. "That's why I wouldn't tell you anything last night. Don't I remember how you argued about that part I made you take at the

## *The Movietone in France*

Femina Theatre last spring? Don't know anything about the talkies? All the better; they like to catch them raw, they say. Anyhow, the director told me to get somebody who was a gentleman, and I could think of nobody better than you."

I swallowed this somewhat ambiguous compliment.

"You will have to act the part of a man who wants a house built. You have to come into the architect's office, you step on the bulb of a toy rabbit, and it jumps in your face. . . . Quite easy. Only, of course, you will have to be passed by the director first. Now listen. You must ask for three hundred and fifty francs a day; accept three hundred, but not a sou less. And, take my tip, don't understand too much French. If they find that you can speak French they will get you into an argument, and then, if you won't come down, they will lose their tempers, and very likely you may not get the job. But if you can't understand what they are saying they feel baffled, they don't know what to do. I had to walk out of the office four times before they understood that an Englishman means what he asks for."

As we rumbled along through the Parisian suburbs C—— explained to me the situation :

"Menjou has had some sort of a squabble with the producers over there, and so is now in France making a bilingual film."

"He talked of the idea when we met him in California," I said.

"Once you have the story and the scenery and the star, hiring another set of actors to play each scene simultaneously adds little to the general expenses, while it doubles the audience," said C——. "But the trouble is to get the English actors. If they are specially imported from London they cost no end, so there is a big chance for anybody who lives in Paris and can act, especially if he has another job that

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

leaves him at comparative liberty. As far as I can see you are in an ideal position. . . .”

I must confess at once that I have never had aspirations toward film fame. Nevertheless my motto in life is: “Try everything once at least, if it is offered.” And if, I could reflect complacently, I should show a certain aptitude, why, there were far harsher ways of having to earn a living than that of acting for the talkies.



MENJOU

In Hollywood the cinema studios are dissimulated. You could drive the length and breadth of the place and never suspect the reason for its world-wide notoriety. But at Joinville le Pont, which aspires to become the Hollywood of France, the intrusion of the new art is unmistakable. On one side of the quiet Seine, the old, small village clusters up the bank, notable only for an excellent river-side restaurant. But facing it, on the other bank, the studios of Pathé and his imitators and rivals dominate the landscape. In Hollywood the studios, externally at least, assume a decorative aspect: a Mexican palace, a Grecian temple, Haddon Hall; here, less hypocritical, they proclaim themselves blatantly as factories of motion pictures; what art there may be lurks hidden within.

Hollywood guards its secrets carefully; the American go-getter and the American reporter have a reputation, not undeserved, for the thickness of their skins. Here we strolled carelessly, unquestioned by the watchman.

As C—— pushed me through the little door of the film studio it was empty except for the presence of a few workmen who were setting properties in position for the morning's work. The French have undoubtedly a native instinct for the rostrum, since, in order to decide on how any piece of

## *The Movietone in France*

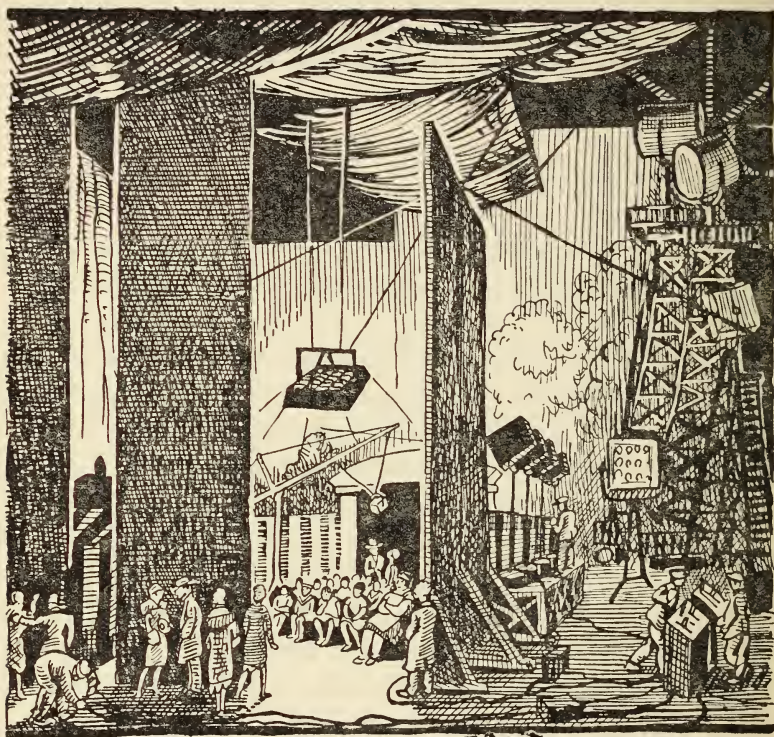
work should be carried out, the foreman would first lead off with a speech, a workman would reply, perhaps a third would answer, and the foreman would sum up—in fact, each new move had thus to be brought to the tribune and solemnly debated. The electricians grouped by the switch-boards, which glistened with levers of bright copper, made an interested audience. Though the time for the start was already past, sign of actors there was none. Now C—— left me to dress for his part, and, although I was thus deserted in the heart of movietone secrets, nobody questioned my right to be there. In Hollywood I should have been forced to explain my presence a dozen times already, or might have been summarily ejected into the street, possibly under arrest.

The scene that slowly and so garrulously grew under the workmen's parliament was that of the Punch-and-Judy show in the Champs-Élysées. The little theatre was in position, the benches had been set, bushes made of plucked branches had been planted all around, and the pink-and-white-striped side-awnings had been hung. Over these, on tall towers of steel lattice, leaned half a dozen unlit searchlights with huge, moon-like faces, and, massed in ranks with square reflectors, like immense basting-pans on end, were the powerful batteries of incandescent lamps used for closer lighting on account of their perfect silence. The whole, scene and apparatus, was shut in from the immense void of the studio by tall, sound-absorbing, flat screens or by deep curtains of felt, while overhead, dependent from the roof, felt curtains hung in graceful festoons like the impossible but magnificent draperies of Veronese or Rubens.

At last the actors began to come in, a few heralding wavelets first, appearing and retreating, but at last setting in steadily, mothers with excited children, girls made up as nurse-maids, *bourgeois*, two actors dressed as park guardians, and an old

## Star-dust in Hollywood

genuine Punch-and-Judy operator who had been persuaded temporarily to leave his legitimate stage for the superior profits of the moving-pictures. They loitered chattering for half an hour before the assistant director arrived. He pushed



THE SOUND STUDIO

them about, explaining their *rôles* for half an hour before the director and Menjou himself appeared. Meanwhile the workmen had been rolling forward large square constructions of beaver-board on rubber-tired wheels, huge handboxes from the tops of which projected curved trumpets like steamer ventilators. A big, windowless caravan of similar cardboard was pushed into a less conspicuous position. In

## *The Movietone in France*

the stuffy, sound-proof seclusion of the first were the cameras. In the caravan was the recording apparatus that synchronized the voice with the action, and the 'mixer,' who regulated the quality and volume.

Around me now was a babel of mixed English, American, and French, with some French-English and English- or American-French.

At my elbow stood a man in a white overall. He had a tall shock of pale grey hair and pale blue eyes set in a congested face. I tried to talk to him; he waved thick fingers in my face as a sign of negation, but C——, returning at that moment dressed as a butler, introduced him.

"This is Alexandre," he said. "He is the make-up man. Don't try to make yourself up. If anything goes wrong they blame you, but if their own man has done it they can't complain. You have to be careful. However, Alexandre is a marvel. He used to work at the Arts Theatre in Moscow, but the Bolshies chased him out. And remember, when you come out to work, get made up at once. If you have had your paint on they must pay you."

"Oui, moa Alexandre, Russe," babbled the make-up man, grinning. "Maquillage."

He pantomimed in front of my face with his hands as though he were mentally preparing to mould it into a dozen different disguises.

An actor dressed as a butler like C—— now approached us with a courteous and formal salute.

"This is Monsieur Paul, my French *confrère*," said C——. "You watch him when he goes on to play and you will have a good idea of the difference between the social positions of a French and an English film actor. Although we act in exactly similar parts, he gets about a third of the salary I do, is glad to get it, and he never dares to talk to the director without calling him 'sir.'"

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

"*Enchanté*," said Monsieur Paul, bowing. He had mistaken C——'s explanations for the customary compliments.

The workmen's parliament was still vociferous on the set, properties were not ready, and the men had talked themselves into almost a *Chambre des Députés* state of abuse. Children were being drilled, the other actors were being instructed in their parts, side business was being now evolved. Everybody was offering advice, including an electrician seated aloft to control the top lights.

"*Mon Dieu!*" ejaculated Menjou. "What a riot! And even the juicers must put a word in!"

At last the rehearsal was considered organized enough. The small, square box containing the microphone was slung out from its gallows' arm over the heads of the two stars. The mixer and the assistant director climbed into their cardboard caravan, the camera-men crowded into their bandboxes. Red lights flickered for a moment above the dark little windows behind which the cameras were alert. A youth stood forward between the camera-boxes and the actors with a pair of clappers in his hand. This was the synchronizing apparatus. The camera recorded the exact moment that the jaws clapped, and simultaneously the mark appeared on the sound-record.

"Silence, silence!" yelled the director.

Slowly the conversation died down. But, as ever, one intrepid talker murmured on under his breath.

"Silence, *s'il vous plait!*" cried the director.

At last a dead stillness fell. Every one was tense, waiting. The clappers yawned with open lips. But the assistant director interrupted from the caravan:

"There's a lamp hissing."

A hasty examination of the lamps was undertaken, broken by the director's cries of "*Silence, s'il vous plait, messieurs et dames!*" as the irrepressible conversationalist began to murmur again indefatigably.

## *The Movietone in France*

At last the silence was absolute ; a thin, razor-like silence, making one think of the taste of an early morning over a still, oily sea. Now came the director's difficulty. In the ordinary movie he could use his megaphone. He could bellow his commands and excite his actors to yet higher feats of emotionalism. But in the talking-film the most complete silence must be his part. He was reduced to impotent gestures, he could but conduct orchestrally. What a penance for a Frenchman !

Menjou had learned his English in America ; his French partly in childhood, but revived during the War. He showed undoubted linguistic talent, but he dodged any difficulties by acting the part of an American in the French version, a Frenchman in the English. Thus any minor shortcomings in accent were easily glossed over. To watch the effect of tongue and of company on his personality was amusing. By contrast with the French company he seemed definitely American, but in contrast with the English actors he reverted to the country of his birth, France. Indeed, his personality seemed to be lodged in a half-way house. The contrast in the dramatic powers of the two languages was also interesting ; in the present scene, a little dialogue between a husband and a newly married wife, the French had a wholly untranslatable crispness, but in that photographed during the afternoon, between a young man and a butler, the English had the undoubted advantage.

Only one short dialogue had been photographed before the whistle blew for lunch. All the while I had been only an interested spectator. A few dashes into the crowd by C—— in an attempt to catch the assistant director had met only with wild Gallic gesticulations indicating hurry, impotence, absolute impossibility, and the like. The whistle let loose a turmoil : mothers hurried in to clutch their children, children ran to find their mothers, nurse-maids, policemen, *bourgeois*

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

poured from the narrow openings between the sound-absorbing flats toward the lunch-room. It was impossible to make a way across that rush of humanity, and when it had subsided the assistant director and his superior officer had disappeared.



ALEXANDRE'S NEW YEAR

In the afternoon the company was moved to a different scene, but the same sense of half-organized disorder was prevalent, increased by the reappearance of Alexandre the make-up man in a state of high elevation. His face was now a bright purple in tint, from which his pale eyes stared like dead turquoises. He pummelled the 'juicers,' dashed at the actors, and ran a friendly comb through their hair; he clutched the edges of the flats or stood rocking in the path of the furniture-removers.

Monsieur Paul was good enough to explain.

"This poor Alexandre," he said, "it is his New Year's Day. He is a Russian, and, exiled from his native land, he must celebrate in loneliness."

Upon the set itself a young man was exhibiting himself, dressed in heights of foppishness coming to a climax in his tie, his cane, and his buttonhole.

"That young fellow," said C——, "is an interesting phenomenon. He was on at first in several scenes, but had little or nothing to do. As soon as he had really to act he was found to be rotten. The director bullied him to such an

## *The Movietone in France*

extent that he lost what spirit he ever had. He cringed into the scene. They couldn't change him because a lot of the film would have to be taken again, so they tried another trick. They began to praise him extravagantly. Now he is convinced that he is the best actor on the lot. But at any rate, as you see, he has lost his slink."

A little later the young man approached us.

"I say," he called to C——, "did you see my photo with Menjou's in the papers yesterday? But, dash it all, they cut out my name."

"He paid to have it put in," said C—— in an undertone. "That, of course, is usual. Everybody who wants to get on in this job has to pay the Press in France. But the cheek to think that they would print his name with Menjou's! They daren't do it. Menjou would come down on that. Why, it would give him hundreds of pounds' worth of advertisement. You bet that Menjou's publicity manager keeps an eye on who appears with him in the papers."

The afternoon drifted away much as had the morning, except for the antics of Alexandre. Several good-natured efforts had been made to induce him to leave the set, but he proved the truth of the old maxim: "Scratch a Russian and you'll find a Tartar." In Hollywood six strong men would have clutched him and would have cast him summarily into the road, to show his face no more, but in France they are more humane. An appeal was made to his self-control. He was implored, in the interests of the actors and of the company, if he must remain on the set, to keep perfect silence during the filming. Alexandre agreed like a gentleman, and the trouble was over.

I spent half of the afternoon trying to catch the attention of the assistant director, the other half in an endeavour to remind him that he had to capture the director. The assistant director approved of me, but the director,

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

captured at last, gave me but a passing glance and said decisively:

"Won't do at all, not the type. But he'll do excellently for the bailiff."

"We will let you know when you are wanted," said his assistant. I retreated to the secretarial department to bargain in purposely execrable French for my salary.

A special motor-bus carried us all—directors, camera-men, sound-experts, and actors—back to Paris.

"Well," said C——, as we bumped along the *banlieue* roads of Vincennes, "your nose is in the job, at all events, and that's the important step. And, my dear fellow, you had better realize that big things may be happening soon in Paris. This talkie business has revolutionized the film industry. You can't export films any longer by just translating the titling. From a possible world-wide sale the makers are suddenly limited to the audiences of a single nation. See what a huge difference that makes! But here in Paris it is a kind of natural meeting-ground for all nations; it is the tactical centre. And don't you forget that with this business the important thing is to get in quick. The first-comers stay in as long as they are worth a ha'p'orth of beans. Every talkie film will have to make bilingual or even trilingual versions, and this is the obvious place in which to make them. . . ."

"Do you know what the director said about you?" remarked C——, after we had left the bus and were walking along the Grands Boulevards under the *café* lights. "He said: 'Well, he may be a gentleman, but he doesn't dress like one.' The fact is he had a costume in his eye, not a person."

"But hang it all!" I protested, "how was I to know? You never told me."

"That's true," said C——. "But let this be a lesson to

## *The Movietone in France*

you, old man. If ever you have to interview anyone about the stage or the cinema put on all your best things. It's clothes that count."

. . . . .

"We will let you know," the assistant had said, but a month drifted by, and I had decided that, after all, the cinema was evidently not my destined profession. In fact, I had lost hope even of portraying a bailiff when a post-card arrived.

"Meet us opposite No. 87 on the Boulevard Saint-Michel, to-morrow morning at 8.30."

At 8.30 next morning the pavement of the boulevard looked very desolate. Not a soul was in sight, so I retired to a *terrasse* for a *café au lait*. However, one by one a small group began to cluster round a lamp-post, and as soon as my *café* was finished I approached them. A young man saluted me and said briskly :

"You air Meestair Gordon? Goot!" He handed me a large photograph. "Dis is vot you aire. You moost be a proken down debt-collector, see; de kind vot 'as von job in two years, onnerstan'? You got to find yourself some old coat, black or blue, wit' worn round de end of de sleef, viskers, yes. Den dat's all. Good day and come out to Joinville to-morrer morning, onnerstan'?"

The photograph represented a dirty-looking fellow sitting at an untidy desk with a telephone in his hand. I did not feel at all flattered by the director's immediate vision of me as this person. I walked home occupied with the problem of my costume. C—— had told me the rule, which was that the actor provided all kinds of everyday wear, the company finding only non-normal costume. Apparently I was judged to be the kind of man who had worn-out blue coats with whiskers round the cuff-ends. High and low I hunted that

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

day for a bewhiskered coat. I progressed through successively degrading degrees of second-hand clothes-dealers. But not one had a bewhiskered garment for sale, nor even one sufficiently cheap that one might bewhisker by artifice. I tried the husband of the *concierge*. I tried the dyer's shop opposite. I tried the patron of our habitual small restaurant. They all expressed deep sympathy and interest, but not one would own to a frayed coat. At last from a young painter I borrowed a coat in the necessary condition, but it was at least two sizes too small. However, it had whiskers. Eureka! I bought myself a stick-up collar, as in the photograph, and I found a grubby dress-tie that had been used to bind up the sprain of a broom-handle. These I packed into a dispatch-case, set the alarum once more, and went to bed to dream of cinematographic triumphs.

Once more unquestioned, I penetrated to the studios. My bailiff's bureau was ready, but at the moment the workmen were pushing a large motor-car into it.

"Hello!" I thought. "I'm to be the victim of an accident, then."

I was soon undeceived, for the director was giving other instructions.

"Now build a high stage and hoist the cameras up on to it. I want them to look down into the car so that nothing of the surroundings can show. And, mees," turning to a dashing blonde beauty near by, "please I want you to speak very distinctly, because they will have to print the street noises over your voice afterwards. And, Jacques," turning to a young man, "don't forget to see that they make that record of the street noises in the Champs-Élysées as soon as possible."

Over the hood of the car a stage was soon erected, and on to this the big camera bandboxes were lifted. While the microphone was being adjusted I approached the director.



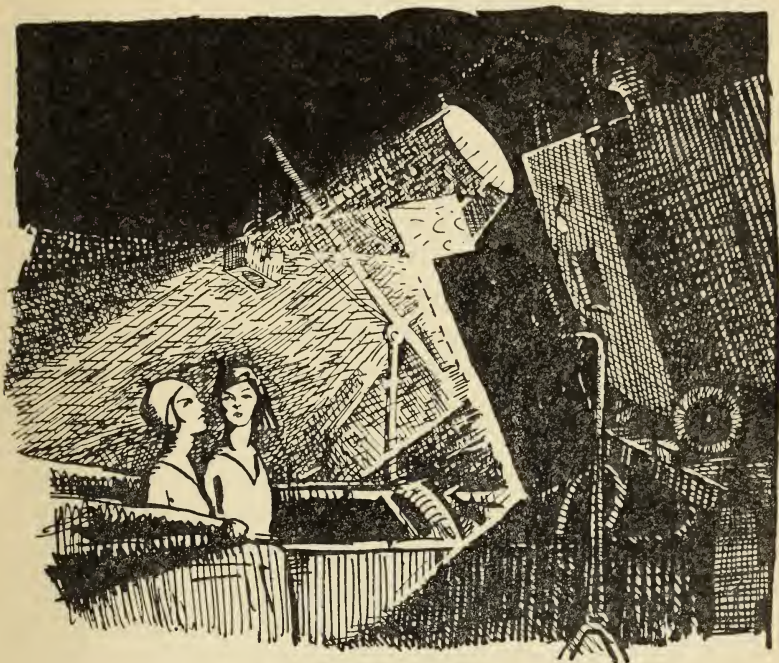
JAN PLAYS BAILIFF



## *The Movietone in France*

"Got your photo? All right. Go and find Alexandre, and tell him to make you up as like that as possible."

The make-up man, a calmer figure now than the Tartar who had been celebrating his New Year, gazed from the photo to my face. He sat me in a chair before a long mirror



CAR AND CAMERA-BOX

and began to rub in pomade. He streaked me with paint, he hollowed my cheeks, creased my forehead, combed my eyebrows back to front, matted my hair, and finished the transformation by dabbing my cheeks with particles of chopped hair. When he had finished I was bound to admit that the director had been right; my face seemed very adapted to becoming that of a broken-down bailiff. From mere personal vanity I could have wished that Alexandre would also try on me another transformation: that in an

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

opposite social direction. I should have liked to see myself disguised as the swell.

The motor-car scene was finished when I returned to the studio, but already the morning had drifted along and lunch was near. I had accordingly put on my ordinary clothes, my second-best, for, in spite of C——'s dictum, I had not thought it appropriate to get into my Sunday specials in order to play a second-rate broker's man. I tried to tell the director that I had the bewhiskered costume in my dispatch-case, but he ran his expert eye over my clothes.

"Oh," he said, "but what you have on is exactly right for the part. Stay just as you are."

I was filled with a sudden exasperation, not only for my lost yesterday, but also for my second-best. Did I really, in this spick, bandboxy cinema society, where even the men have their hair permanently waved—did I then present so naturally seedy an appearance?

I remembered with relief that the studio had an inside restaurant, for, with the 'mug' that Alexandre had painted on my own, I could not venture abroad looking for food and must otherwise have gone lunchless. But here were none of the lovely waitresses of Hollywood, here were no sad beauties rejected because of the sheer brainlessness that so often accompanies Nature's perfect handicraft, as though, tired of having created so much perfection on the outside, she had no energy left to adorn the intelligence as well. Here were no golden-haired peris like those who haunted the gates of the Californian movie paradise.

My lunch was disturbed by qualms. The ordeal was approaching minute by minute. I had still no idea of what I was to do, for on asking the assistant he had replied nonchalantly:

"Oh, a mere nothing. Just a few lines to talk over the telephone. Miss S—— will give them to you afterwards."

## *The Movietone in France*

Lunch over, I discovered Miss S—— in a small office. There I was introduced to the English translator of the dialogue.

Miss S—— scribbled four and a half lines on half a sheet of paper. Certainly they were simple enough : a call, a few plain statements of fact, and an annoyed question. But in their very simplicity I suspected a trap. On the stage it is easier to commit a murder than to say : "How do you do?" As I carried the lines on to the set the author followed, and as I was struggling to memorize my words he began a furious diatribe against the star. They had differed on the question how the English conversations should be delivered. The author insisted on correct English. Menjou, with his American training, wanted them colloquial and snappy. He had frequently altered the written script to his own vernacular. The author had protested ; but it is one thing to protest to £1000 a day and another thing to get your protest noticed. A thousand a day is a little like royalty—at least, in its own opinion.

I should have delighted in the author's denunciation : he even used a much more snappy vernacular than that which the star wished to superimpose on his text. But at the moment I wished him away. His really exciting monologue distracted me from my study, for even four and a half lines must be learned with some thoroughness if they are to be repeated instinctively while one is occupied with composing appropriate gestures and facial expressions.

At last the set was prepared, the big, vertical basting-tins of reflectors were concentrated on me seated at the table with my telephone at hand. The small box of the microphone yawned at me from beneath a pile of account-books and papers.

"Now," said the director, "we'll try a little rehearsal."

With an effort I tried to shoot the four lines into my subconscious memory, so that I could concentrate on action and

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

expression. I had not understood how difficult this could be. On the stage the part must first be well memorized ; early rehearsals concentrate on words more than on actions, and the words have time to grow naturally into action. But now I found that a separate memory was needed for each department—for words, for action, and for expression. There had been no time to get the three co-ordinated. Did I try to invent appropriate action I found the words slipping from me ; if I concentrated on the words, action and expression lost their vigour. But even so there was another lurking ordeal.

“That’s not right at all !” cried the director, springing to his feet. “Haven’t they told you the action? Mr Menjou at the other end is saying that he doesn’t want to buy a baby lion cub. His wife is in the room, and he doesn’t want her to know that you are telephoning about his debts, see? You have to get the expression of a man who is astonished at what he hears, you must listen with growing amazement, as if the other chap had gone mad, see? And then you must shout twice : ‘What, what !’ Isn’t that in your script?”

“It’s the first I’ve heard about it.”

“Take your time . . . take your time,” said the director, in soothing tones.

But it was difficult to take my time with those batteries of lamps waiting, those black eyes of the camera-boxes seeming to crouch in front of me ; the microphone with its mouth open as if ready to swallow my words. In a few minutes with a mirror I was sure I could have invented good expressions, but to grimace at that group of intent, unamused, critical faces was a daunting business. I became very conscious of how little one can know what one’s face is doing. I tried again.

“No, no !” cried the director, springing to his feet. “You are now merely being a man with a telephone in his hands. You are not listening to what the other fellow is saying, do you understand?”

## *The Movietone in France*

Yes, I understood, but I reflected desperately: "How can a man listen visibly?" The answer popped into my mind: "With the eyes." So, in addition to facial expression, appropriate movement and speech, I had to invent ways of using my eyes expressive of different moods of listening—four collaborations to harmonize instinctively.

At last the grim watchers expressed a qualified approval.

"Lights on!" said the director.

At once the massed illumination blazed into my eyes. The basting-tins, with groups of twenty huge incandescent lights apiece, poured glory over me, while over their shoulders the big moons of arc-lamps concentrated on me long columns of light. But, in addition to light, they also flooded me with heat. I felt like Lamb's sucking-pig on a spit. If they had spun me round I should have browned nicely and would no doubt have provided quite excellent crackling. My mind was already perspiring with stage-fright; my body perspired to match. Beyond the massed lights everything was black; only the youth held the open clappers dangerously near my nose.

"After the clappers have clapped," said the director's voice from the blackness, "count five slowly in your mind and then begin."

I had a horrible sense of helplessness before those inanimate mechanisms, the camera and the microphone. They were as abstract as the stars, uninterested. In front of a human audience a slip could be corrected, a fault excused. But no exercise of personality could influence those frigid mechanisms. Only a week before C—— had told me that an English colonel, accustomed to command, had broken down helplessly under the fright of that mere mechanical audience. An actor draws vitality from the audience itself: it helps him on; but here was nothing but the dazzling, burning light, the unresponsive darkness, and these aloof recording instruments.

## *Star-dust in Hollywood*

The clappers snapped, and I tried to count. I could not count at all. I counted all kinds of numbers, one, five, nine, three. . . . I was clinging with all my power to my words, how could I distract my memory by concentrating on counting. Indeed, up to that moment I had never understood what an exclusive concentration of mind is needed to count correctly. I don't know whether I counted five numbers or eight, but at last I raised the telephone to my ear and began my speech.

The counting had upset me, I tripped.

"Cut!" shouted the darkness. "All right, though. Don't worry."

Then I thought of a new bit of action. I picked up a pen and tapped the paper before me to emphasize my words.

"Cut!" came from the darkness.

"The pen is twice as near the microphone as your mouth. It will record four times as loud and will come out like a pistol-shot. The business is good, but tap gently."

A third time I went through the inane speech and repeated the foolish expressions, a fourth time, a fifth. . . . My sense of assuredness was growing.

"That is all right," said the director's voice from the darkness. The lights snapped off, leaving me blinded, and in what I felt to be a still underdone condition; what the restaurants would call *saignant*.

. . . . .

I removed Alexandre's libel from my face, and, as the studio bus would not start for a full hour, I chose to return by train. I rumbled along the suburban railway—oh, the sweet coolness of the air on my tanned face!—and I reflected over the situation. Undoubtedly three hundred francs a day seems a nice salary for, say, a month's occupation or even for a single day's work. But in this case it had resulted in

## *The Movietone in France*

three hundred francs for three days' work, which was a very different affair.

Also I pondered on the dream of Paris as a new international moving-picture centre. I was now able to contrast the happy-go-lucky management here with the precision of Hollywood; for Hollywood has this characteristic, that even its most disordered mental vagaries are carried out with all possible precision of technique. The memories of those tardy starts, of the workmen arguing with their foreman, of the juicers offering advice to the director, of the exiled Alexandre celebrating his New Year's Day on the set, and of the carelessness that put every obstacle in the way of making a success of my part did not make me feel too optimistic. I decided that, unless one very perspicacious director should perceive in me the probable symptoms of a movietone star on the strength of my maiden performance, I should be ill-advised to cultivate illusions of future fortune on the strength of Paris becoming an international Hollywood.















